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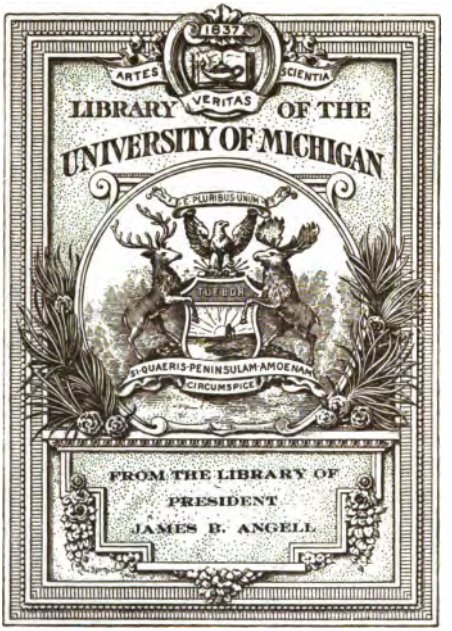
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MOTHERS AND DAUGHTERS;

BY THE AUTHORESS OF

"PIN MONEY,"—"MANNERS OF THE DAY," &c.

What gay ideas crowd the vacant brain
When Peers, and Dukes, and all their sweeping train
Garters, and Stars and Coronets appear,
And in soft sounds "Your Grace" salutes the ear!

RAPE OF THE LOCK.

FIRST AMERICAN, FROM THE SECOND LONDON EDITION.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

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MOTHERS AND DAUGHTERS.

CHAPTER I.

EUPHÉMON.—Il aura mes biens aujourd'hui;
Et son ainé n'aura pour tout partage
Que le courroux d'un père qu'il outrage
Il le mérite; il fut dénaturé.
RONDON.—Ah! vous l'aviez trop longtemps enduré.
L'autre du moins agit avec prudence,
Mais cet ainé, quels traits d'extravagance!
L'ENFANT PRODIGUE.

LADY MARIA WILLINGHAM was a person who, with indifferent features, had always managed to be called pretty; with very moderate abilities, had maintained the reputation of being extremely clever; and with a narrow selfish heart, was continually cited as the most excellent woman in the world. The tact which had thus universally enabled her to assume a virtue where she had it not, was of course a qualification of no feeble force. Early in her fashionable career it had been whispered to her, that a dress of the last new Parisian mode was an admirable mask for the body; an earnest, and deliberate, and mysterious tone of conversation, a most imposing cloak for the deficiencies of the mind: and she was well aware that *the heart* is usually taken upon the trust of these preceding and more ostensible endowments. She therefore confined the demonstrations of her virtue to a refraignment from all sins unrecognised as of the highest *ton*; and to a pathetic vibration of the head and elevation of the eyes, whenever the delinquencies of other people came under discussion.

In one respect Lady Maria had appeared to rise superior to her own failings, and to have suffered a remission of her callous egotism;—she had made what is called *a love match*. But love, like other sad dogs with an ill name, is rendered

responsible for many a crime, in addition to his own unjustifiable criminalities; and if ever Cupid could have proved his innocence by an *alibi*, it was most assuredly in the instance of Charles Willingham's elopement with Lady Maria De Vesci! I have already asserted that she was neither handsome, clever, nor amiable. At the period of what was termed her "rash marriage," she was nearly five and twenty, with a portion of three thousand pounds, Irish currency; and attached, as a Bath and Cheltenham appendage, to a deaf mother, the dullest Dowager extant throughout the united realms of Great Britain.

At Ramsgate, where, through her qualification of "ladyship," Lady Maria maintained a very creditable degree of ball-room precedency, the De Vescis became acquainted with Mr. Willingham, the eldest son of a family of opulence and county antiquity. He was fresh from college, or rather, he had still a term and a degree in prospective endurance; being three years younger than the fair tactician from Bruton-street, who had brought the faded looks and blighted hopes of another infructuous season to be repaired by the breezes of the Isle of Thanet. After dancing, riding, walking, and flirting together, with the assiduity becoming a watering place, Charles Willingham very properly fell in love, and Lady Maria very naturally fell into a fit of musing. She considered that her lady-mother was paralytic, that her lordly brother and his wife were far gone in severe evangelism, that her prospects were extremely precarious, and her means most unaristocratically limited; and in consequence of these lamentable coincidences, she thought it on the whole advisable to sigh and grow sentimental in honour of poor Charles and his honest passion; and to sanction with her smiles his application to his father for a maintenance, and to her own maternal Countess Dowager for her hand.

Unfortunately the replies of both were unpropitious. Sir Claude Willingham, having a favourite second son, was by no means anxious for the early marriage of his heir apparent, and consequently restricted his promise of an income for the young couple to a thousand a year; and on the receipt of this almost interdictory intelligence, the Dowager, whose head had been shaking for years past with the palsy, redoubled its movement in negative vehemence. "*Her* consent to such a miserable match for her dear Maria? Never!" She could not hear of it with patience.

Like other stupid old women, poor Lady De Vesci, however, contrived to defeat her own views on the subject. At all times a bore of the most stupendous magnitude, she grew thrice doubly tiresome under the irritations of the disaster which threatened her domestic peace. She concentrated all her prose into ceaseless diatribes against the folly and wick-

edness of improvident marriages, and the thriftless frivolity of the young men of the age; and she insisted on keeping her superannuated kitten perpetually under her own eye, in a stifling Ramsgate parlour—enlivened only by an elaborate effort in lambswool knitting, and the daily lecture of the Globe newspaper. Lady Maria had been long compelled to evening-casino;—it was now hinted as a morning recreation, by way of sedative. In vain did Charles Willingham languish on the pier, and mope upon the cliffs; her Ladyship was secluded as strictly as a nun of any sisterhood in Spain. He fixed his gaze upon the daily airings of the Dowager's chariot, and indited a sonnet thereupon; then thought of the Cambridge horrors of his ensuing term, until his grief absolutely expanded itself into elegiac stanzas! Both effusions, accompanied by an epistle in simple prose far more to the purpose, he bribed towards the dressing-table of Lady Maria; who, having no feelings of filial reluctance to subdue, finally ceded to the united influence of three such tender missives; and to escape from a dreary home and beggarly prospects, ran away with him on the following morning, and was always said to have perpetrated a love-match!—So much for the judgment of the world!—

The young couple did not long persist in their undutiful alienation from the heads of their respective and respected houses; for they had not a guinea wherewith to maintain the dignity of their "truant disposition." Lady Maria, an expert and insinuating pen-woman, soon prompted an exculpatory, but very submissive epistle from her husband to Sir Claude; and despatched another from her own fair hand to the Dowager, such as would have done honour to the sensibilities of any Araminta or Adeliza in any novel throughout the lachrymose range of Lane and Newman's shelves; yet in defiance of the epistolary eloquence of both, no answer was returned to either! Affairs now became pressing. Even Charles Willingham's buoyant spirits failed to sustain themselves against the depressing spectacle of an empty purse and an increasing file of bills; and Lady Maria, by no means prepared to endure with patience the exigencies commonly consequent upon a "love match," considerately proposed that their sole remaining five pound note should convey them in a chaise and pair to Bruton-street.

According to the most approved precedents, the butler and footman were bribed,—the forbidden door clandestinely opened—and the "penitent wanderer," with disordered tresses, rushed to the feet of the purblind Dowager, who was obliged to put on her spectacles ere she could recognize the discarded offspring of her bosom. Lady Maria Willingham delivered her tale—whether unvarnished or not—with her accustomed plausible deliberation. She wept much, and expos-

tulated not at all; dilating upon the deep remorse of her self-accusing filial tenderness; and including Lady De Vesci's favourite maid; her asthmatic pug—ay!—and even her Penelope's web of lambswool, among the affecting reminiscences of her repentance. The Dowager, touched by so intimate a combination of domestic images, contented her righteous rage by the bitterest vituperation against the seducer of her innocent child; and before six o'clock the *trio* was seated at dinner together, in the friendly intimacy of her Ladyship's stuffy boudoir—a reeking sudatorium, past the ascertainment of Réaumur or Fahrenheit.

Fortified by this encouragement, Mr. Willingham addressed a second letter to Heddeston Court; and Sir Claude was at length moved—and if by the spirit, by a very angry one—to favour his penitent heir with a definitive answer; acquainting him that the allowance of a thousand a-year originally promised, would be limited to five hundred, in consequence of the indecent disregard he had shown to public opinion, and to the long established respectability of his family. Sir Claude then digressed into a confession of his own political and religious faith, and an *obligato* flourish in honour of Church and State, with which he was so much in the habit of embellishing his county addresses and electioneering clap-traps, that he found it difficult to put pen to paper without indulging in its cut-and-dried pomposities.

"Good heavens! what is to be done?" exclaimed Lady Maria, as she thrust the epistle into its franked envelope, and threw it on the dressing-table. "This letter is the announcement of our ruin!"

"Nay!" dear Maria, do not let us look upon the dark side of things. Your mother has pressingly invited us to make her house our home, and we need therefore consider this niggardly allowance as only present pocket-money."

"A home! Yes! and a charming home it is; stifled with sick lap-dogs, a tribe of toad-eaters, and their nightly card-table,—and stunned from morning till night with the monotonous shrieks of a peevish parrot!"

"Dearest Maria! recollect for a moment the affectionate interest with which you used to talk to me at Ramsgate of the attractions of your beloved home!"

Lady Maria shrugged her shoulders.

"And of all your duties towards the declining age of an excellent parent! All these may be now fulfilled; and lightened—may I not say so dearest love?—by the companionship of a person faithfully and fondly attached to you."

"And even suppose, Charles, that we do resign ourselves to the slavery of boring on with mamma, she cannot live for ever: and I know Liniment has long thought her in a declining way."

Young Willingham was rather shocked by this light allusion to the death of a parent, who, despite her foible for sick lap-dogs and loo-playing toadies, was still *a parent*;—but it was uttered by the lips of his dearest Maria, and he forgave it.

"Liniment may be mistaken; and whenever the melancholy event really takes place, you will of course derive some slight advantages from Lady De Vesci's will, to replace her present kindness and generosity."

"Advantages! you are quite mistaken. Advantages! not a shilling! My mother has nothing but her jointure—has not saved a guinea, to my certain knowledge; and my brother will do nothing for me beyond the regular payment of my miserable pittance. What a prospect!"

"You have always told me," said Willingham, unwittingly, "that you were totally ignorant of the state of Lady De Vesci's affairs, and that your brother had often spoken of increasing your provision."

"Did I? You take things so literally! At all events nothing can be more literal and positive than *your* father's letter; and nothing more certain than that till the death of Sir Claude, we have nothing to do but to starve on six hundred a-year."

"*Certain?* By no means! We must contrive, dearest Maria, that he should see you; that he should become acquainted with all your excellent and endearing qualities, and I am convinced that he will not persist in his opposition. My father, although a valetudinarian, was formerly esteemed one of the most polished men in England, and he is quite capable of appreciating your elegant mind and manners. Besides, love, supposing our income to be limited for a time, our ultimate prospects are secured by a strict entail; and then, how often have you assured me that competence with the man you love—"

"Competence?—absurd!—Charles, Charles, do not deceive yourself with set phrases. What you call competence, I call penury. However, it is too late to think about it now. Six hundred a-year!—Heigho!"

And "heigho!" echoed the mortified Willingham, as he left the room, and consoled himself with the companionship of Lady De Vesci's fretful parrot; whose "set phrases" he began to think, for the first time, preferable to those of his own dearest Maria.

Her Ladyship's prognostications, however, whether couched in set or random phrases, were strictly fulfilled. Lady De Vesci gradually dowagered away; every east wind filled her affectionate daughter with alarm; and not Pope himself could have "rocked the cradle of declining age" with a more tremulous solicitude than that which was instigated by Lady Maria's dread of forfeiture of her mother's handsome esta-

blishment and comfortable table. She was held up as a mirror of filial imitation to their remiss offspring by every dowager throughout the parishes of St. George and St. James. Nobody, indeed, could be more assiduously expert in placing the gorgeous Indian screen impervious to a draught; nobody more accurately versed in the mysteries of chicken-panada! But all would not do. In spite of her watchful vigilance, in spite of Liniment's co-operative care, poor paralytic Lady De Vesci died in the agitation of her first grandchild's first tooth. I say *grandchild* in all its neutral indefinity; because I am unwilling to admit, that a person so provident as Lady Maria Willingham, could have been guilty of producing a *daughter* in utter disregard of the Heddeston Court entail!

A daughter, however, it was; and before its discontented mother had recovered the horrible crisis of her ejection from the comfortable domicile of Bruton-street, which now, by a reminiscent figure of speech, became once more "her beloved home;" before she had tamed down her endurance to her damp cottage at Chiswick, and the tough roast mutton which forms the legitimate nutriment of a love match, *a second* came to magnify the sum total of her disasters! Two little Miss Willinghams in less than three years;—and Charles pretending to be so fond of them too—just by way of contradiction!

The budding of this second female olive branch, meanwhile, determined Mr. Willingham to make a second appeal to his father's liberality; but as he had formerly prospered so ill in his written manifesto of misfortune, he resolved, in the present instance, to try the effect of *viva voce* solicitation. Having considerably improved in familiar tactics under Lady Maria's tuition, he had become aware that it is much easier to *write* "no" than to say it, particularly to one's own and eldest son. He put himself accordingly into the mail; and just as daylight began to glimmer over the goodly hop-grounds of the county of Kent, he alighted at the Three Fiddlers, the highly unpoetical ensign of the inn at Heddeston, the family at the court being much too ancient, and too highly established, to seek or endure the vulgar propitiation of "the Willingham Arms" in their own especial and feudal village.

Poor Charles had many sufferings to undergo in this retreat of rural indulgence, besides the company of the exciseman and tax-gatherer, the perfumes of punch and tobacco, and the gritty tenure of a sanded floor, which he had patiently anticipated. After a due encounter with the respectful recognition of the tap-room and its presidency, he had to learn that he was pretty universally regarded as a disgraced and exherited member of the house of Willingham; while his younger brother, who, by a precipitate union with the daughter of his

private tutor, had certainly "defied the opinion of the world, and outraged the prejudices of his family," in a degree far more flagrant than that of his own delinquencies—was comfortably settled under his father's roof-tree, with a full and unlimited dominion over park and chase, cellar and buttery, treasury and rent-roll, throughout the liberties of Heddeston and its court! Mine host of the Fiddlers naturally accompanied this advertisement of mischance with the ancient and appropriate saw, which forbids one man to look over a gate, and permits another to abduct the steed from its pasture; and poor Charles was fain to admit the plausibility of the dictum.

But Mr. Willingham had not journeyed sixty miles to content himself with the philosophy of a village hotel. It is written that "there are more things in heaven and earth than are dreamed of in" even that of the Danish Horatio; and Charles earnestly trusted that there might be consolations in store for him in his father's mansion, beyond the conjectures of the tap-room of the Fiddlers. Accordingly, after the performance of certain tonsorial, lavatorial, and masticatorial duties, he set forward upon his humiliating errand; and arrived at the lodge of Heddeston Court in a plight but ill becoming the heir of all its dignities. He found himself, however, warmly, and even affectionately, welcomed by the old retainers of the house; to whom the remembrance of his boyish inconsideration remained the more precious, from the contrast it afforded with Mr. Joseph's parsimonious habits and chilling reserve. Dependents are more frequently attached to us by our failings than by our virtues.

Charles Willingham was conscious of a painful thrill of reminiscence on entering the old hall. It was very early; none but the domestics were yet astir; yet, even among these, he found himself greeted by a far more eager burst of sympathy than had been personally bestowed upon him since his departure from his hereditary home. Lady Maria was an iceberg, compared with the old housekeeper who had formerly officiated as his nurse; and the tears which graced the eyes of the old steward, the butler, and the body coachman—who had been the equestrian professor of his youth—fairly put him out of conceit with the refrigerated hospitality of Lord and Lady De Vesci, his solemn brother and sister-in-law. He almost wished, for a moment, that he had brought his two little girls with him. He felt that perhaps even they might be loved and caressed at Heddeston!

But this visionary triumph was not destined to endure; the breakfast-hour and Joseph Willingham soon arrived to disenchant his imagination, and all was Spitzbergen again! Joseph received his brother with a very sincere and cordial demonstration of displeasure at his arrival. The interest of

every pathetic history requires that it should have a villain to boast of; but although the younger Willingham's was a decidedly villanous position; although he was in truth "the mildewed ear blighting his wholesome brother," yet he had not the energy, the stamina, the *character* of which villains are composed. He was a miserable being—strong only in selfishness—and incapable of injuring a fellow-creature, unless his personal interests were influenced by the deed. Unfortunately those of Charles stood in immediate competition with his own, and they were therefore preordained to sacrifice.

For the preservation of all those who might be exposed to a similar warfare on the part of Joseph Willingham, Providence had gifted him with a singular tendency to the garrulous expounding of his own tactics. He was so pleased with his own prudence, so enamoured of his own plans, so persuaded of the excellence of his own theory of domestic management, that he could not refrain from the betrayal of all its littleness, and all his own egotism. "I certainly should not have closeted myself in such an inactive profession as the church," he would say, "only it would have been a thousand pities to let such a fine family living as Heddeston go to my cousin John." Or in an October sale of a horse to a particular friend, he would acknowledge, "I am aware that you get it five pounds too cheap; but you see it would have eaten its head off during the winter."

In his fraternal colloquy with Charles, he was scarcely less explicit of his views and feelings. They breakfasted *tête-à-tête;* for Sir Claude habitually, and Mrs. Joseph incidentally, were too much indisposed to leave their chambers; and Charles Willingham, as he cast his eyes upon the redundant repast and its rich accessories, could not but mentally revert to the scanty frugality of his dampery at Chiswick.

"You are anchored in comfortable moorings, Joseph," said he, mournfully, as the heavy cream rolled slowly from its gilt ewer into his steaming cup.

"It may seem so—the world probably thinks so—and even *you*, with a narrow income, may fancy that my position is an enviable one. But when you have seen my father, half-doting, and peevish, and whimsical as he is, you will form a better judgment of all we have to put up with. He is incapable of managing his own affairs, yet jealous of the least interference; he requires the sacrifice of our whole time, yet is irritated by conversation, and will not hear of a visitor so much as dining in the house. He does not spend the eighth of his income, yet he is always on the imaginary verge of pauperism —always fancying he shall be ruined! and so he *would*, if Sophia and I did not keep an eye on the establishment. The Heddeston servants are quite enough to waste the whole es-

tate; he has been ruled by them these fifty years, and it really requires a third power in the state to see justice done to all parties. Now, as my father does not choose to have *you*, Charles, it is just as well that he should have *us*. I have the interests of the whole family far more at heart, you know, than a stranger."

"Very true; and in some points of view, it certainly *is* a sacrifice on your part. The rectory is a lovely spot, and you might keep your hunters there, and do as you liked; and I suppose my father maintains his old antipathy to Lord Carmychael and the hounds."

"Worse than ever; he allows me nothing but a shooting pony, and grudges me that."

"By Jove! I could not stand a privation on that score! Were I rector of Heddeston with—what shall I say?—fifteen hundred a-year—I would not give up the enjoyment of the field, and the credit of having a good horse in my stable, no! not for the advantage of living here at rack and manger!"

"My dear Charles! you miscalculate strangely. Fifteen hundred a-year, did you say?—The first year I scarcely made up thirteen; and even last year, the balance of my tithe-book and glebe did not stretch beyond fourteen hundred and seventy-five! Believe me, you miscalculate strangely! As to living here at Heddeston, I have solely my ultimate interest in view. As I often observe to Sophia, the entail is so strict, that *I* can only hope to benefit by the personality; so you see it becomes my business to watch over the economy of the house, and keep an eye to the accruing funds of the estate."

"Humph!" growled poor Charles, between the pauses of his buttered roll. "I perceive that *my* intervention is considered altogether superfluous in the family."

"Why, to say the truth, I could wish that you had postponed your journey, were it only for a week or so. When my father read in the Kentish Chronicle an account of the birth of your last girl, he was in such a towering passion, that—as I observed to Sophia at the time—I think he would have gone any lengths to bribe you to cut off the entail; and —and"—

"Place you, Joseph, in my shoes."

"Why not exactly—that is, not immediately;—but perhaps eventually dispose of the property where there was the most promising succession of heirs male."

"Humph!" reiterated Charles Willingham, pushing away his plate with a gesture of despair."

"You see he had fixed his sanguine expectation on *my* having a son; and about a fortnight ago, when Sophia presented me with a little girl———"

"A little girl! aha!———"

"He grew more peevish and indignant than ever He has scarcely had half an hour's accession of good humor since that time; and I verily believe that were there a young lady in the country fool enough to have him, Sir Claude would marry again, for the sole pleasure of spiting us both!"

"*Fool* enough!" again reiterated Charles, with his thoughts reverted to his own experience of the interested selfishness of womankind. "As if there were not abundance of fools to be found in any county of the United Kingdom, ready to jump at a jointure on the Heddeston estates."

"That is just Sophia's remark! and I have profited by the suggestion to decline the proffered visit of two of her own younger sisters, whom her cunning mother was anxious to foist upon us during her confinement. No, no! I was quite up to that manœuvre, thank heaven!"

"You do not seem to entertain a very flattering opinion of your wife's relations."

"Who does?—one always knows them so much too well! However, to return to Sir Claude;—I really wish, Charles, you had not happened to time your visit so inauspiciously; for your arrival will only revive the remembrance of his mortification, and without benefiting you. He had almost got over his disappointment: he even asked me yesterday after dinner how the baby was getting on, and when Mrs. Joseph would be churched! To be sure he added one of his usual ungracious observations about the expense of maintaining so many nurses in the house; as if I and Sophia would keep a supernumerary servant one day longer than was necessary!"

"Mr. Joseph!" said the rubicund butler, slowly intruding his portly person into the breakfast-room, "my master has asked for you twice. He has taken his chocolate and half a square of dry toast, and complains of being very bilious."

"Well, well, never mind, Dickinson. Dr. Dodderwell will be here at two; and between the newspaper, and the weather—the glass and the almanac—we shall get him on very well till then. Did you propose an Abernethy biscuit?"

"Sir Claude took five or six, Sir, before he was up."

"Humph!" again exclaimed Charles Willingham, "*bilious!*—poor old man!"

"I will go and acquaint him with your arrival," said the Rector of Heddeston, rising deliberately from the discussion of a final cutlet. "For since you *are* come, he *must* know it; and the sooner we ascertain the effects of the shock, the better. I quite tremble for poor Sophia's feelings on the occasion; her maternal solicitudes will naturally point out the very serious disadvantage your visit may prove to our poor little destitute girl."

"*And mine!*" ejaculated Charles. But Mr. Joseph had already departed on his pious errand; and Dickinson, the ro-

seate butler, alone remained in audience of his pathetic apostrophe.

"Ah! Master Charles!" responded the old man, with a sympathetic wheeze, and a prolonged vibration of his powdered head.

It was a shake which, like Lord Burleigh's, was destined to supersede a world of eloquence; and Mr. Willingham interpreted from the gesture, a thousand unutterable things. "Dickinson!" said he, "times are sadly altered at the Court."

CHAPTER II.

Un homme partial est exposé à de petites mortifications; car, comme il est également impossible que ceux qu'il favorise soient toujours heureux, et que ceux contre qui il se déclare, soient toujours en faute, ou malheureux, il nait de là qu'il lui arrive souvent pe perdre contenance ou par le mauvais succès de ses amis, ou par la gloire de ceux qu'il n'aime point.

LA BRUYERE.

"Joseph, pray take your feet off the fender," said poor peevish Sir Claude, as they were all three sitting together on the following evening; "you fidget me to death."

The submissive Joseph obeyed.

"And pray don't balance your chair in that tiresome manner, you are enough to give one a nervous fever."

Again Joseph was obedient: and Charles Willingham began to think that the dampery at Chiswick, with its freedom of action, was in truth preferable to the splendid slavery of Heddeston Court.

"Has any one been down to the lodge? Are the evening papers come yet?"

"No, Sir."

"I really think the Highflyer grows slower and slower every day. Don't they talk of starting a new coach?"

"Yes, Sir."

"Ay, ay! but it will be some time before the old county families bestow their patronage upon an upstart city speculation."

"Very true, Sir."

"And pray, Sir, why do you suppose that we are greater fools than the rest of the world?"

"I, Sir?—I suppose nothing."

"No, truly," muttered Sir Claude; "between indolence and caution, there is no pumping an opinion out of you. An't you going to visit your lady this evening, Joseph?"

"I was just thinking of moving, Sir; and as it is late, perhaps you will allow me to see you up to bed first."

"By no means. Your brother Charles's company enlivens me. I have got a great deal to ask him about what has been going on in town this session, and you may profit by the opportunity to amuse yourself with the squalling of your bantling—your *young lady!*—the first that has graced, or disgraced, poor Heddeston Court these fifty years. Thank God, I never cursed myself with anything but *sons*."

"You were in luck, Sir," said Charles, attempting to laugh away his brother's embarrassment, and to conceal his own vexation.

"There—there—good night, Joe," resumed Sir Claude, fretfully. "Take care to turn the handle of the door, instead of slamming it; and pray don't stalk along the passages over-head, as if you were ascertaining the stability of the rafters."

"No, Sir, no!" said Joseph, with humiliated forbearance; and as he left the room he cast a resentful look upon his brother, as being both the witness and the cause of all this extraordinary irritation.

Charles Willingham had never at any period of his life been a favourite with his father. Sir Claude was a jealous, narrow-minded man, who had been equally disgusted by the popularity and the liberal expenditure of his heir. That he *was* his heir, indeed, was a sufficient motive for distrust; he looked upon the deed of entail which secured his son's inheritance, as an injurious act committed by his ancestors in favour of his posterity. Joseph was the object of his bounty—the martyr of his caprices; but, as to Charles, the only way in which he could exert a paternal authority over *him*, was by rendering the period of his own life a period of penance to his son; he knew that he had no *post obit* powers of tyrannical oppression.

And then his wilful marriage had proved a fresh stumbling-block of offence in the path of this peremptory parent. Sir Claude Willingham was a proud man, and was anxious that his successors should form suitable alliances; but not by connecting themselves with a degree of rank superior to his own—he was extremely tenacious of his supremacy in his clan. At the time when the maritime provinces of the south were infected with the invasion fever, with all its malignant symptoms of fencibles and volunteers, the Heddeston yeomanry corps had well nigh brought down the honours of the peerage upon its founder and commandant; and in that case Sir Claude would have made no objection to the union of either of his sons with a nobleman's daughter—provided always that the nobleman were a baron, and dating from no very ancient creation:—any reference to Magna-Charta or

Domesday-book, would have been sufficient to forbid the banns.

But Lady Maria de Vesci was descended from a whole dynasty of antediluvian earls; she must necessarily be proud; she was confessedly poor: and the measure of Sir Claude's antipathies rose beyond all just bounds. He therefore avenged his sense of domestic injury on occasion of Charles's filial rebellion, by increased affection and redoubled liberality towards Joseph. He installed him in the family living, domesticated him under his own roof; and offered but a very transient and trifling opposition to an alliance which would have revolted him at any other time by its plebeian associations.

"You see, Sir," observed Joseph, after having cautiously revealed his long and secret engagements with Miss Sophia Bodham, "a clergyman should neither expect nor desire to form a very brilliant connexion; he must look to the comforts and respectability of his future home: fine ladies make but a sorry figure at the head of an economical glebe-house establishment. Now Sophia is an excellent manager—has been accustomed all her life to clerical habits; and the fortune she does not *bring* me, she will save by her prudence."

"Of two bad choices, Joe, I own you have made the best: this affair does not vex me half so much as Charles's cursed folly. *Two* Lady Marias in the family would have been the death of me at once."

"I am persuaded, Sir, you will be enchanted with my Sophia!—such a modest sense of her own inferiority, and of her strange good fortune in matching into the Willingham family!"

"The daughter of a country parson—of a schoolmaster—may well be proud of such an alliance."

"Not exactly a *schoolmaster*, Sir;—a respectable clergyman preparing a few young men of condition for college, can scarcely be called a schoolmaster!"

"There is only a bunch of birth to choose between the two—no mighty distinction!"

"So excellent a housekeeper as Sophia, I suppose never existed. You have often heard me speak of the bread at Ilverstone; the second course at the parsonage was positively equal to Mrs. Frangipane's; and Sophia, to my certain knowledge, presided over everything. We never sat down to dinner that her mother did not mention it!"

"I wonder what Lady Maria knows of the mysteries of the oven!" exclaimed Sir Claude, feebly chafing his wasted hands with an air of triumph; although he secretly despised all these details, and would, under any other circumstances, have seen through and resented the whole plot.

"Oh, you must be well aware, Sir, that *I* have no pretensions to consort with lords and ladies; the respectability of

my own family-connexions is sufficient for *me*. Where the estates are bound by an entail so strict as ours, a younger brother, who incurs the risk of a numerous offspring by an early marriage, is bound to consult their interest by selecting a mother who has been carefully and frugally educated."

A numerous offspring!—new projects unfolded themselves to the imagination of Sir Claude at the mere sound! Lady Maria had already produced a daughter; and might yield no future heir-male to the property; while Mrs. Joseph would probably enable him to baffle the hopes of his own prodigal son;—Mrs. Joseph would probably prove a Hecuba, and supply the Heddeston entail with a score or two of young Trojans. On this hint he spoke his sentence of paternal approval; and within a few weeks, the young couple were united by his cordial sanction, and settled irrevocably at the Court. It was said in the county, that he was a most placable and liberal father.—So much, again, for the opinion of the world!

During many months the establishment flourished surprisingly under the new administration; Sir Claude had never thought the Heddeston poultry so fat, the Heddeston cheeses so rich, nor the Heddeston apricots so transparently clarified, as since Mrs. Joseph's accession to the throne of domestic management. She was indefatigable in wiping his spectacles, reading the newspapers, chiding the retardment of the Highflyer, and ringing the bell for Dr. Dodderwell's horse, on the conclusion of his daily visit to the valetudinarian of the Court. Sir Claude observed to every successive visitor that his daughter-in-law was a most superior young woman; and as Lady Maria's second child had proved to be another daughter, the prospects of Sophia's promised increase to the family soon afforded the engrossing interest of his selfish and fractious existence. But when Miss Willingham the third was announced to her ungracious grandsire, the *prestige* formed by his anticipations vanished in a moment. He now began to despise Mrs. Joseph as cordially as he had ever detested Lady Maria; she had been the instrument of disappointing his malice;—she had been the means of proving him in the wrong!

"Well, Charles, and what do you think of your brother's wife?" demanded the old man, with a sneer, when due time had been accorded for the stealthy progress of Joseph's footsteps above. "I think you visited her this morning?"

"I did, Sir; and your previous information concerning her had been so unfavourable, that I was rather agreeably disappointed."

"Humph! Why you don't mean to tell me that you did not find her deucedly ugly?"

"Youth is a veil that covers so many defects!"

"Aye, and worse than ugly—mean-looking contracted; an upstart in every feature, every gesture, every tone!—I hate a vulgar voice."

"So do I, Sir: but Mrs. Joseph employed hers in the utterance of so many kind expressions concerning my brother and his whole family, that—"

"A mere hypocrite—a very crocodile!"

"That I had no leisure to think of anything but his good fortune in having secured so acquiescent and domestic a companion," continued Charles; who, for his brother's sake, was willing to give the most favourable character to his opinions. His feelings had been, in fact, considerably mollified towards Joseph by the spectacle of his humiliating and uneasy position in his father's house; his own nature, too, was so amiable and conciliatory—he had been so much touched by the art with which his sister-in-law had exhibited her baby, and her maternal affections to captivate the young father, parted for the first time since his marriage from his own home and his own children—that he was very sincere in his admiration of the discretion of Joseph's choice. He could not but contrast it with his personal predicament; he could not but compare Sophia's caudle-cup sensibility with the callous and unmotherly fine-ladyism of Lady Maria. Sir Claude's ill-nature, however, was not to be so silenced.

"Acquiescent and domestic truly! Why, I suppose you know who she was?—I suppose you know that your brother brought his bride home to Heddeston Court with her plebeian fingers covered with the paste of the dumplings she had been kneading all her life?"

"I have a great respect for dumplings and their artificers, Sir," said Charles, laughing; "a narrow income makes a man acquainted with strange fare."

"Charles," replied his father solemnly, without noticing this running commentary, "if ever you should have a son—which I begin to doubt—never send him to a lonely parsonage in a marshy country, where there are four cunning unmarried daughters, open-mouthed, to decoy his boyhood into a premature engagement. What signifies any scholarship he may possibly acquire, compared with the low-born, low-bred wife with which he is *sure* to hamper himself."

"*My* son (I acknowledge with you, Sir, that he begins to appear a very apochryphal personage) will probably inherit his father's predilections; and had you sent *me* parsonaging into the marshes instead of Joseph, I should have been far more likely to return to Heddeston with an ague caught in snipe-shooting than with a vulgar wife caught in———"

"Aha! the truth is out then; you *do* think her vulgar!" interrupted the old man with glee, spitefully chafing his lean hands. "Pray now, Charles, is Lady Maria dark or fair,

tall or short? When I expressed my original disapprobation of your marriage with a poor nobleman's daughter, I certainly had not dreamt of your brother's matching with a poor clergyman's."

This was the first inquiry Sir Claude had ever hazarded touching his aristocratic daughter-in-law, and the opening appeared to her husband highly propitious. "Maria is a remarkably graceful, elegant woman, Sir, without being strictly beautiful. She has great refinement of mind, and a degree of judgment highly valuable to a hair-brained scapegrace like myself. I can accuse her but of one failing, my dear father—that of sharing *your* unkind antipathy to little girls. She was deeply concerned by the birth of a second daughter."

"Was she, by Jove?" exclaimed Sir Claude, brightening; "I'm glad to hear it—*very* glad to hear it. Well, well! she must come down to Heddeston, and freshen herself up with Kentish fare and Kentish breezes, eh, Charles? Aye! and she can bring the *girls*—the *two* girls—with her. I suppose they will not look uglier, or squall louder than Mrs. Joseph's?"

"Little Claudia, Sir, is a perfect beauty; and———"

"You have named your eldest after me, eh?"

"I took that liberty without troubling you by a probably unwelcome request for your sanction; and Eleanor, the baby———"

"Well, don't let me hear any more about them. Go back to town to-morrow, Charles, and bring them down with you as soon as you can. I suppose you have a carriage. I suppose that, had you been limited to *one* hundred a-year, a Lady Maria would have required an equipage?"

"Lady De Vesci's was bequeathed to us by her will; but poor Maria found the common comforts of life so much beyound our reach, that she insisted upon having it sold, as well as some family jewels, which were far more precious to her. But the sacrifice was made to pay *my* debts, and she has never appeared to lament it."

Sir Claude, who was little aware that this latter part of the statement was a very amiable and palliative view of the fact, on the part of his hen-pecked son, was prodigiously ashamed, "Then you had better take up the carriage with you; *my* daughter-in-law must not be seen in a hack chaise. You did wrong to part with your wife's property, Charles; you should have applied to me for assistance."

"If you remember, Sir, the Christmas before last———"

"Pshaw!—pshaw! what is the use of reverting to old grievances? All that is over now, and had better be forgotten. You must prepare Lady Maria to overlook the past, and to enjoy her visit to Heddeston."

"It is an event to which she has looked as an unattainable pleasure."

"At all events," said old Willingham, pursuing the train of his own reflections, "*her* faults will be those of a gentlewoman. Now you have no conception of the low, vulgar structure of Mrs. Joseph's mind! For the first six months of her residence here, she used to harass me to death with her eternal details of the peculations of my servants. She spoke so plausibly, that she even persuaded me to institute a stable-allowance for my horses; and I wish you had seen the old set of bays at the end of two months!—It cost me twice the money saved, in farrier's bills, and beans, to make up for lost time! You must have observed yourself, a thousand paltry alterations in the minutiæ of the household. I trust you did not attribute them to *me*?"

"I hardly imagined, Sir, that my brother and his wife would presume to act without your sanction."

Sir Claude was ashamed to confess to his elder son how thoroughly he had been cajoled into delegating his authority into their hands. "Now just look at this cursed grate," said he, taking up the poker, by way of cover to his own confusion. "Rumfordized! you see—Rumfordized to the standard of her own parsonage-experience! As if a handful of coals could be coaxed into giving out the genial warmth of a full, glowing mass of ignited matter!—and at Heddeston, too, where the woods are groaning to be cut down! By Jove! I don't wonder that this chafing-dish of cinders sometimes provokes Joseph to put his long thin legs upon the fender! Till that woman was shut up in her own room, I was wholly unsuspicious of the innovations she had introduced among my old servants. But their complaints have reached me now: I have found her out; and as soon as she gets down stairs and about again, I shall take care to let her know, that if she cannot repress her ardour for minor domestic reformation, she must practise it at Heddeston Rectory, and not at Heddeston Court. I do not intend *either* of my sons' wives to regulate my establishment."

Charles Willingham, who, as I have before observed, was considerably brightened in his perceptions by the constant companionship of Lady Maria, was wise enough to discover that this rapid change of feeling, and explosion of displeasure towards Mrs. Joseph, arose solely from the sex of her recent offspring; and therefore exulted very moderately over the prospects it afforded to himself. The object of his visit, however, was already more than attained; and he was more deeply touched by his father's kindness, more gratified by his invitation to his family, than its real motives deserved. He listened with respect to the old and well-known effusions of Protestant loyalty with which Sir Claude could not refrain

from closing the evening; and on Dickinson's arrival with the ten o'clock tray, he patiently sympathized with his father's long-established murmurs against the inconsistency of his gruel, and the tenuity of his dry toast.

On the following evening, the scene was duly recounted and re-recounted by the fire-side of the dampery at Chiswick; and it was with a sentiment of the most elated surprise that Lady Maria found herself, and her paraphernalia of daughters, nurses and bandboxes, rolling through the county of Kent, in a carriage bearing the emblazonments of the family of the Willinghams towards its ancient inheritance. She had already pre-determined that it should be long enough before the horses' heads were turned, with the same burden, in an opposite direction. She had very little intention of ever finding her way back to Chiswick.

CHAPTER III.

When Greek meets Greek—then comes the tug of war.
SHAKSPEARE.

THREE days had necessarily elapsed between the departure of Charles Willingham from his father's mansion, and the arrival of Lady Maria and her children among the men of Kent; and three days afford a sufficient period for wonderful manœuvres to an active commander of the forces. Mrs. Joseph, under the excitement of her opponent's advance towards the field of action, had defied both doctor and nurse—ancient axiom and modern experience, and armed in a panoply of flannels, had made Sir Claude's tea, and shared his dry toast and gruel in his own particular parlour, on two successive evenings.

"Salt seasons dainties," sings Lord Byron; "Tea seasons scandal," sings the wooden cuckoo of every maiden coterie; and it was miraculous with how abundant a proportion of envenomed breath Mrs. Joseph contrived to accompany the preliminary two cups, and supplemenatry "small half-quarter of a dish," which formed the nightly stint of Sir Claude. She did more than "hint a fault and hesitate dislike," towards her coming sister-in-law. She boldly affirmed that *poor Charles* was sadly changed since his marriage; that his brother, in their private conversations, had found him dreadfully low; that it was to be hoped Lady Maria might be induced to alter her mode of conduct towards her husband and innocent babes during their visit to Heddeston; but that really after her ingratitude in deserting the aged and infirm

parent, who had proved so affectionate a mother to her, for the sake of a dissipated young man, with whom she had been only a few weeks acquainted, it would be absurd to expect much, either from her feelings or her principles. No! it was very plain that Lady Maria had *no heart!* Mrs. Joseph believed, indeed, that family affection was no longer in vogue among the circles of *high life!*

Now Sir Claude, although he detested the traces of *low life* manifest in herself, and was somewhat on his guard against the interested motives prompting her malicious insinuations, could not, from habit, divest himself of a certain degree of faith in her gossiping narratives. At all events, the favourable picture traced by his elder son of his wife and home, faded under the disparaging light thus thrown upon its obscurities: the whole day on which Lady Maria was expected at the Court was passed in the most feverish restlessness; in wandering from chamber to chamber in fretful inspection of their preparations; which, through the officious interposition of Mrs. Joseph, were rendered as expensive and as troublesome to every member of the extensive household, as the utmost refinement of ill-nature could instigate. Perhaps she desired to extend, to their latest limit, those privileges of domestic supremacy which her presentiments assured her were rapidly verging towards abrogation. Meantime poor Sir Claude, in spite of an extraordinary indulgence in antispasmodic tinctures, and an extra spoonful of white mustard-seed, was as nervous and unhappy as heart could wish:—already he repented of his superfluous complaisance towards his eldest son's family, as bitterly as though it were not among the first instances of good-nature which he had exercised during the sixty-eight years and a half of his mortal existence!

But Mrs. Joseph little knew with whom she had to deal!, As well might she have attempted to "drink up Eisel—eat a crocodile," as cope with the profound finesse of Lady Maria. Hers was the mere raw material—the mere brute quality of *cunning;* but Lady Maria was endowed with the same natural qualifications, polished into *tact* by an elderly encounter with the friction of the world. For nine-and-twenty years she had been a spectator or actor in the intrigues of society at large; for nine-and-twenty years she had been dexterously administering to the weaknesses and vices of others, and for a considerable portion of that time she had been busied in managing her mother, who made up in obstinacy and perverseness what she wanted in intellect and the power of self-governance. She had already decided that Sir Claude would form by comparison a docile victim: to hamper *him* with bit and bridle would be mere play-work; and as to Mrs. Joseph herself, she felt that it would be a waste of tactics to employ

anything but the most straightforward measures, in discomfiting and discountenancing the obscure daughter of a web-footed dominie, whether M.A. or B.A. or LL.D.—Mrs. Joseph, indeed! Lady Maria scarcely condescended to think of her as a rival. Like Napoleon, she had already prematurely prepared the bulletin, proclaiming her sister-in-law's "total defeat, with an immense loss."

But the carriage was scarcely disencumbered of its multitudinous imperials, and she had not listened fifteen minutes to Sir Claude's minute catechization concerning the state of the roads, and the promptitude of attendance insured by the sight of the Willingham equipage, throughout all the varieries of White Lions and Blue Boars between Camberwell and Heddeston, before she found occasion to alter her opinion. There is a sort of freemasonry among the artful, revealing them to each other at first sight. Like the Cartouche and Mandrin of the French Vaudeville, who mutually disencumber their pockets of watch and purse during an introductory dialogue, the sisters instantly recognized the masterly adroitness visible in the efforts of each; and Lady Maria was really delighted by the discovery. She was something of an amateur in her vocation; and her hand had been so long out—to employ finesse in her intercourse with Charles would have been so like advancing *en échelon* to attack an undefended stone wall—that she might congratulate herself upon her future prospects of finding occasion to rub the rust from her obsolete weapons of offence and defence. As to the reverend Joseph himself, it was astonishing how quickly and how completely her dislike subsided into contempt. A man whose loquacity prompted him to place his plan of attack in the hands of a rival general, was despicable indeed!

Mrs. Joseph Willingham had sufficient discernment to be perfectly aware of the superiority of her opponent's strength in the contest; but the mere apprehension of defeat, by depriving her of her presence of mind, soon threw all her manœuvres into confusion, and effectually exposed her weak points to the enemy. Deeming anything like defiance, or even bold defence, to be unavailing, she affected a new mode of interesting the sympathy of Sir Claude. She assumed the modesty of conscious insignificance, and attempted to become "poor dead Mrs. Joseph." This was a dead failure! While she toiled and tugged, sighed, talked, and insinuated, Lady Maria defeated her labours by the well-maintained semblance of perfect unconsciousness; like a snake she glided, with noiseless gesture, hither and thither—piercing every auger-hole she wished to penetrate. No sooner did she find her sister-in-law take refuge in an amiable humility, than she elevated her own head with graceful dignity and

overlooked her altogether;—sending her to Coventry with the most courteous and urbane indifference.

Possessed of none but the common-place principles of her art, Mrs. Joseph meanwhile continued to employ them as the forlorn hope of her ambition. She persisted in addressing her flagrant adulation to Sir Claude, unconscious that, although he had been contented to swallow its flattery while no spectator stood by to satirize the meanness of both, he was by no means anxious to betray his corrupt appetite to his new inmate. She had instructed her nurse to angle for his favour with the usual grandfather's bait—the marvellous likeness of her jaundiced infant to himself; and to contrive that its daily walks should cross *his* daily airings, and its ascent and descent of the great stairs coincide with his own periodical hours of rising and setting. But it had never occurred to her plebeian taste to feminize the Christian appellation of the touchy Baronet; and while she became fidgeted to agonies by his frequent inquiries after little Claudia, she was amazed by the rigid tenacity with which Lady Maria persisted in secluding her children from his observation. On her first arrival she had prudently selectly for their use the hereditary nursery of the house; which, as is usually the case in respectable old family mansions, was elevated beyond all risk of intruding its clamours on the rest of the family; and was undisturbed itself by aught save the cawing of rooks on the chimney tops, or the eaves'-dropping companionship of the swifts and swallows.

The two unwelcome Miss Willinghams, therefore, were neither seen, nor heard of, nor thought of in the family. Lady Maria had the sense to resist all the old man's courteous overtures for their appearance in the drawing-room; and no sooner did he commence his daily inquiries concerning "poor little Claudia," than she immediately led him to incidentalize on his own "life and times," by some adroit allusion to Lord North's administration (the epoch of his maiden speech); or by some inquiry touching the beauty of Lady Sarah Bunbury, who was the cousin and court-rival of his first love. She possessed a divining-rod at whose touch the rock-spring of his latent eloquence failed not to burst forth; and a mental stop-watch, by which she could exactly ascertain and limit the duration of its flow.

Now of Lord North and Lady Sarah, Mrs. Joseph was wholly innocent; nor did the experience of her marsh seclusion suggest a single question by which she could mark an assumed interest in the topic, or prolong the debate. Besides, Lady Maria possessed another vantage ground of unquestionable supremacy. Constitutionally trained from her earliest youth by the thermometer of a Dowager's temperament, she could not only preserve an unheightened complexion amidst

the feverish excitements of the atmosphere of Sir Claude's valetudinarian parlour, but could actually luxuriate in the breathlessness of his hermetically-sealed chariot;—an enclosure which Mrs. Joseph, whose experience was limited to the parsonic modesty of a gig, never encountered without peril of epilepsy. *Her* Galenic maxims, too, were culled from the exploded pages of Buchan, while those of Lady Maria recorded the *viva voce* wisdom of Sir Walter Farquhar and Dr. Baillie; and could run through an extempore scale of fashionable nostrums, including every "anti" that ever enriched the stamp-office, or the columns of the Morning Post.

Sir Claude Willingham became insensibly entranced by the influence of all these domestic accomplishments. Weeks passed away like days, and months like weeks; and although Lady Maria refrained not from periodical allusions to the charms of Chiswick, to the cording of trunks, and the epistolary importunities of her London friends and relatives for their return, she was delighted to perceive that the old gentleman was obstinately pre-determined against sanctioning their further domiciliation at the dampery. No sooner had she satisfied herself that her society was vitally important to his comfort, than she resolved to retain an absentee tenure upon that much-abhorred dwelling, as an admonitory rod to be held, *in terrorem*, over the head of her father-in-law; and the very name of Chiswick became converted into a sort of spur wherewith to rouse his flagging affections.

With the valetocracy of Heddeston Court, in the mean time, Lady Maria entertained a tacit alliance, after the fashion of the unjust steward: giving them no personal trouble, and graciously overlooking peculation and peccadillos wherever they confronted her eye. Moreover, she possessed over Mrs. Joseph, in the estimation of the ancient servants of the house, the superlative charm of patrician rank; she was not only the wife of the heir apparent of all its honours, but, by birthright, herself a Ladyship! If pride were banished from the earth, it would be found safely sheltered in the steward's room of some family mansion!—the last temple dedicated to its altars.

The neighbours, too, were all on the eldest, or *inheriting* side of the question. The grandiosities, from a dread of plebeian intrusion into their mystic circle; and the mediocrities, from a jealousy of seeing Mrs. Joseph promoted over their own heads.

"It must be a great bore to poor Lady Maria Willingham, who has always been accustomed to such good society, to find herself forced into association with that vulgar schoolmaster's daughter," said Lady Monteagle to her own four tall spinsters, each and all of whom had formerly attempted,

without success, to undermine the fidelity of the staunch Joseph towards his heroine of the marshes.

"It must, indeed, mamma," replied Miss Marian, the eldest of the maiden squadron. "A younger brother's wife, too, to set herself up as an authority—and such an authority! She had actually contrived to persuade that poor silly old man to shut himself up in his forlorn dungeon, and convert himself into a recluse! However, since Lady Maria's arrival, things have found their way back into their old channel. We have dined at Heddeston four or five times since Christmas; and although one seldom meets any one there but the old humdrum county set—people one knows by heart in all their sameness of dress, equipage, and opinions—still it is better than having the house of our nearest neighbour barred up, like the County Lunatic Asylum.

"True, my dear; and although, as you wisely observe, we never meet anything new there—anything *available*"—she looked significantly at her four unmarried daughters—"yet the house is a very good resource whenever we have a party staying with us. Heddeston Court and a luncheon, form an excellent object for a ride, when your brother and his college friends are here. It looks suspicious, you know, to keep young men sauntering about the shrubberies, or lounging in the music-room all the morning; and it is far more agreeable, and more useful too, to find the honours done by a woman of the world, like Lady Maria, than by such a prim, underbred, overbred, ceremonious personage as that Mrs. Joseph."

"To be sure it is," exclaimed Margaret, the youngest of the quartette. "She might have done very well to preside over the baked meats of the smoky vicarage parlour; but I never saw any one more miserably misplaced than she used to look in that grand old hall, among the family plate and family pictures. It was entirely Mrs. Joseph, by-the-bye, who put a stop to our project of a bow-meeting in Heddeston Vale."

"Yes, Margaret," rejoined her sister, "and don't you remember when she planted Lord Stapylford next mamma that morning at luncheon?—and having placed you and me together, desired her own stupid bore of a husband to 'take care of the young ladies;'—as if *he* knew how to do anything but take care of *himself!* Such ignorance of the world! Now, Lady Maria has *so* much tact!"

"I must say," observed Mrs. Darnham, the wife of the curate of Heddeston, to her mild spouse, "that Lady Maria's arrival at the Court has been a very fortunate event. This is the second haunch we have had this season, besides constant supplies of fruit, and the loan of the pony! Now it would have been long enough before the Joseph Willinghams

thought of showing us any such attention. *She* had been so long accustomed to the saving line, that she seemed even to grudge the poor creatures from the village every stick they were allowed to gather in the avenue! As to ourselves, considering who she *was*, and what we *are*, I think it was incumbent on her to be more considerate and more respectful: but fine feathers make fine birds; and since she so successfully employs hers in lining her nest, she has quite forgotten you and me, Darnham!"

"Aye! my dear! and herself too. Now it was only last Sunday three weeks that——"

"For my part," interrupted Mrs. D., who was far from tolerant of any prolixity but her own, "I do most sincerely hope that Lady Maria will give an heir to the estate, and establish herself at Heddeston Court, if it be only to spite Mrs. Joseph. Her Ladyship is so vastly condescending! She lent me the pattern of Miss Claudia's frock last week for my little Millicent; and she seldom comes here without going over the poultry-yard. I have no doubt I shall get a brood of the Heddeston game-bantams before the summer is over; and Mrs. Joseph, you know, refused me, point-blank, last year."

I know not whether the Destinies were propitiated by the anxieties of Mrs. Darnham, or by the secret invocations of the Lady Maria herself; but before the close of the second year of her settlement in Kent, its County Chronicle announced, with becoming paragraphic honours, that the family tree of Heddeston Court was graced with fresh glory in the birth of a son! and all the preparation, expectation, and exultation which had long awaited the event, fell far short of the universal triumph bestowed on its realization. The bells of Heddeston Tower were well nigh chimed to powder—the woods of Heddeston Chase were all but reduced to ashes by a mighty conflagration of bonfires! Torrents of ale that might have floated the yacht-club, poured their amber tides through the clamorous village; and its weekly dole was daily repeated between Sabbath and Sabbath for the space of a calendar month. As to Lady Maria, she oppressed her agonized sister-in-law on the occasion with a martyrdom of prosperous condescension; and it was diverting to observe the spasmodic twist of countenance which Mrs. Joseph attempted to convert into a congratulatory smile, as she bent over the cradle of an heir apparent, as eagerly coveted as ever was a Dauphin of France!

Charles Willingham himself, although of the family far the more interested in the event, rejoiced with becoming moderation in his fortunate paternity. He loved little Claudia and Eleanor, in fact, as well or better than the little fair white mass of human imbecility, displayed by the head nurse

as his "princely boy;" and since he had been admitted by his whimsical parent to share in the comforts of his brother's prosperity, he was neither anxious to provoke his envy, nor supersede his expectations. He was good-naturedly fond of Joseph, and selfishly satisfied to insure his daily companionship in riding, driving, shooting, fishing, and hunting over the estate. So long as Joseph and his wife remained at Heddeston, he did not feel himself a peremptory fixture at his father's head-table; or compelled to economize with the bailiff, or prose with the steward. Leave him the legislation of the body corporate of game-keepers, and the persecution and prosecution of all the poachers throughout the property, and Charles cared but little in whose hands the budget of the financial department was deposited by his father.

But of all the personages affected by this important family catastrophe, Sir Claude was at once the most elated and the most actively malicious. It seemed impossible that *he* should forgive Mrs. Joseph for having been the passive means of disappointing the projects he had formed for his favourite son; and in good truth he laboured to drag her cup of bitterness with fourfold wormwood. He insisted upon leaning on her arm in all his visits to the exulting Lady Maria; upon consulting *her* taste in all his presents to his auspicious grandson; and he continually signified in her reluctant ears his intention of making an immediate settlement in favour of the female branches of Lady Maria's offspring. He scarcely knew, he said, in what more flattering manner to mark his esteem and gratitude; and from that hour the little girls were peremptorily withdrawn from their elevated solitude, and promoted from their companionship with the solitary sparrow on the housetop, to that of the stately peacocks spreading their lavish glories among the beautiful lawns of Heddeston Court. Their Lady mother, on her redescent into the saloon, found Claudia established on grandpapa's knee, and Eleanor busy with his spectacle-case; but she was passive under the innovation. She even began to agree with worthy Mrs. Darnham, that they were the prettiest little girls in the world, and to forgive her husband's predilection in their favour; for they no longer marred the prospects of her ambition!

Meantime poor Mary Willingham, Mrs. Joseph's unlucky babe, remained strictly exiled to her own apartment. Lady Maria, with provoking patronage, insisted that she should share the favour and indulgence lavished upon her own two graceful sprites. But it might not be! the malicious old man willingly tolerated her admittance into their pleasures; while, by his sneers of comparison, he contrived to convert the concession into a chastisement.

Mrs. Joseph's heart had long been bursting with mortifica-

tion. She saw that her own sun had set for ever at the Court—that her hopes of domestic rule were at an end—that she must confine the future triumphs of her pride to her *own* family; where the parade of having married a Baronet's son would still count for something! Poor thing! she was left to the miserable consolation of her precedence over her neighbours, Mesdames Darnham and Pilkington, and of saying spiteful things to Lady Maria whenever occasion offered. Nor in truth was her fair sister-in-law slow at a rejoinder; she was far better skilled to envelop her retorts in a provoking display of courtesy; but they were not the less bitter nor the less biting. Whenever this war of words occurred between them—and it was generally after Sir Claude had drowned himself to sleep for the evening in his easy chair—their respective husbands, like the owners of two angry dogs, were fully occupied in patting them into mutual submission. Occasional growls or snarls from their several retreats, would still give tokens of suppressed ill-will; tokens which were as constantly soothed by "Sophia! pray recollect yourself!" or "Dearest Maria! for *my* sake forbear!" from the appeasing lips of the perplexed brothers. Sophia, indeed, appeared to be the only person towards whom dearest Maria did not deem it necessary, or find it her policy, to assume a show of courtesy. In *her* presence she wore all her failings with undisguised defiance—snapt at her husband, scolded her children, sneered at Sir Claude. She seemed determined to mark her contempt, by an exhibition of her utter indifference concerning Mrs. Joseph's opinion.

So long as the balance of domestic power remained in any degree suspended, this state of things had endured, and might endure: but from the moment that Sir Claude's partiality threw an undue weight into the scale—from the moment that victory, perched on his little grandson's cradle, decided in favour of Lady Maria, the conflict was no longer to be borne. A few weeks afterwards, as Charles Willingham and his brother were riding home together from a coursing meeting, Joseph unfolded his intended removal to his Rectory. Much did he say of the duties of his profession, which required his stationary residence in the village; but that sort of cant phraseology did not impose upon the kind-hearted Charles, who had long sympathized in his mortification.

"Duties of your profession? And pray why is Darnham a less efficient representative than he was last year? He understands the people and their ways far better than you do; and at a distance of two miles, you are always within reach of a consultation when difficulties arise. No, no! Joseph! you really must not think of leaving my father."

"You do not consider the solemn engagements into which I have entered towards my parishioners. The parish be-

comes more populous every year; and the farmers are beginning to hint at something about a third service; at which Darnham very reasonably demurs."

"Well, then:—increase his salary; give him the pasturage of the home field and the right of common he has asked you for so often, and the bargain will easily be made. I have a very good opinion of Darnham. He got that thorn out of Don's foot, which puzzled us all so terribly the first day of pheasant-shooting last year."

"But even were an arrangement effected—I really *must* consult my own interests first in such a case—I consider it my duty——"

"Come, come, Joe!—you know as well as I do that all this sudden change of plan arises solely from my father's slights to little Mary and your wife; which, I do assure you, vex me at least as much as yourself. But you know his whimsical temper; and it is just as likely that next week he may take it into his head to banish Nell and Claudia."

"No, brother, no!—not while *you* have a promising boy to become the head of the family. To speak openly, however, it *is* our mutual change of prospects which has influenced me about removing to the Rectory. As long as our chances were equal, my father being, as you observe, so very whimsical, there was no saying what his partiality might have induced him to do about the entail."

"Humph!" muttered Charles, switching off the head of a tall thistle in the hedge, to the great discomfiture of his favourite mare.

"But now, you know, all *that* is over. My father hates the sight of us; and if we irritate him by outstaying our welcome—why, we may lose our chance of even the personality, which at present I consider as good as settled on us. He signed his will the day before your arrival."

"Humph!" repeated Charles—sacrificing another aspiring weed to his resentment of his brother's selfishness.

"Now—as Sophia very sensibly says—if we settle at the Rectory during my father's lifetime, he will be obliged, in common decency, to do something for us in the way of furniture, plate, and all that; which will cost him little, and be everything to us; whereas, if we wait until his death, all the Heddeston property, which is heirloom—"

"But with your living, and allowance, you must make up, even now, three thousand a-year."

"True! but an increasing family!"

"Well! well! settle it in your own and your wife's way," rejoined Charles Willingham, somewhat nettled, as he turned his remembrances back upon Chiswick's moistened shades. "Be assured, Joseph, that no brotherly affection will be wanting on my part, to improve your situation."

"We think of removing in May; for Sophia will be confined sometime in August."

In May, accordingly, they did remove: in August, Mrs. Joseph presented her husband with a very superfluous son; and poor peevish Sir Claude, in the midst of his exultation at finding his honourable name thus doubly armed against extinction, caught cold in his very first visit of inspection to the Rectory. With the assistance of a physician or two, he contrived to aggravate his disorder into danger; and before Joseph and Sophia had found time to re-elevate their drooping crests, or to form new projects about the entail, a pompous achievement affixed over the entrance of Heddeston Court, announced the final defeat of their unreasonable expectations, and the accession of Sir Charles Willingham to his title and estates.

Happy Lady Maria! How gratefully did she attach herself to the active Dr. Dodderwell! How smilingly attire herself in a second suit of filial sables!

CHAPTER IV.

Death having preyed upon the outward parts
Leaves them insensible; his siege is now
Against the mind, the which he pricks and wounds
With many legions of strange fantasies.

SHAKSPEARE.

Sir Charles and Lady Maria Willingham had now attained a very elevated point of human prosperity. They were in the enjoyment of a splendid income and an ancient title; they possessed an almost baronial mansion in the very garden of England: and a house in Grosvenor-place, which might have fairly tasked one of George Robins's florescent advertisements to describe its merits;—Sir Charles had his hunters, and a seat in Parliament—Lady Maria her opera-box, and the family diamonds. The father lavished his tenderness upon two lovely little girls—and the mother wasted her solicitudes upon the future heir of his house. Nor were these manifold advantages derived under ordinary circumstances of inheritance. By the special favour of destiny, the Willinghams had been sentenced to attain their flowery Eden by a briery path; they had been seated in the lavish lap of luxury by the admonitory hand of Penury herself.

It has been said that Providence marks its contempt of prosperity in the personages on whom it showers the gifts of fortune; but this is a vulgar error. Prosperity is too im-

portant a medium of human probation to be unwittingly conferred; and Satan, "grown wiser," quoth Pope, "than in the days of Job,"

Tempts more by making rich than making poor!

Sir Charles and Lady Maria, although sinking under the weight of wealth and station, were the most discontented mortals in the world! I question whether their Chiswick murmurs had ever risen to such a clamorous pitch as that which marked their indignation on finding the claim of the Joseph Willinghams to all the Bank stock, consuls, long annuities, India bonds (East and West), canal shares, and tontines, standing in the name of the late Sir Claude—an unimpeachable right! Even Charles, who was a liberal-minded man and a generous brother, confessed that he considered his father's will an infamous document, reflecting equal discredit upon the testator and his legatee.

"Sir Claude must have been well aware of the nature of the entail," he observed to his equally irritated wife." "He was therefore perfectly acquainted with my incapability to make the smallest settlement on my poor girls, or to increase the dower of my wife beyond the paltry pittance assigned centuries ago to the Dowagers of the Willingham family. The rent-roll makes a splendid show, to be sure; but in these days of agricultural distress, a rent-roll is a piece of empty pomp, good only to decoy a man into an expenditure beyond his means. Heddeston Court, too, is so wretchedly out of repair, that I must instantly take up money to keep it from falling over our heads—and"

"Yes, yes: Joseph, with his views on the personality, knew better than to let a mason, or a carpenter, or a plumber, come within sight of the house. I was persuaded, Charles, when he insisted so strenuously on that fall of timber last autumn, that your father's will had passed through his hands, and that he was looking into the land-steward's balance."

"Oh, he never made any secret of his expectations; and had he been content to leave me a decent share of ready money, just to grease the wheels of this crazy old machine of an estate and keep us going, I should not have grudged my brother a becoming competence. However, he will find *my* feelings strangely altered towards him now;—if he thinks to play the Great Mogul at Heddeston any longer, he is plaguily mistaken. Terms of decent civility are all I wish to maintain with the Rectory. I dare say, now that I am in Parliament, he will be applying for my interest to advance his professional views. So great and so rich a man as Joseph, will not care to be addressed as anything less than *Mr. Dean*."

"Dear Sophia would be a precious article for a Bishop's

wife! Turning up her ruffles to carve the mutton, as if she were still at the head of her father's academical table! Your Parliamentary interest!—when you are literally obliged to maintain it by hiring a house in town at fifty per cent., which the least consideration on your father's part, or moderation on Joseph's would have enabled you to make your own by a trifling purchase.—No, no! Mr. Joseph; *I* shall take care that our terms of civility with the Rectory are as cool as your own conduct."

To do Lady Maria justice, she maintained this declaration with unvarying consistency; but Sir Charles, although he still continued to grumble, could by no means coax his excellent disposition into anything like a malicious rancour against his brother. He always contrived to find his way to the Rectory twenty minutes after his arrival at Heddeston; and although, with the terror of his wife before his eyes, he dared not openly convey to little Mary and little Charles any London tokens of their uncle's affection, he took care that the Highflyer should be put in requisition to deposit certain square brown compact paper parcels in their nursery, bearing the auspicious names of Edlin or of Izzard!

In one respect, indeed, he seemed resolved to disappoint [illegible] own anticipations; he never permitted Joseph to make an application for his interest with the powers that were; and long before the immortal Nash had withdrawn from the modernized quadrangle of the Court the dapper clerk of the works delegated to inspect the progress of its architectural degradation, Archdeacon Willingham had found his way thither on the old shooting pony—for his five thousand a-year had afforded no addition to his stock—to moralize over his brother's profligate expenditure, and thank him for the unsolicited patronage which he had already caused the Rectory to be visited with the dignities of the church.

But Lady Maria, although in the undisturbed possession of every luxury and joy of life which might be supposed to mollify the human heart towards its fellow creatures, was never known to repress a single iota of the detestation she had originally conceived against her sister-in-law: the best of patriots never *hated* so cordially as she did! A very trifling share of magnanimity, however, might have served to moderate her malice; for nature seemed to delight in confirming her triumph over Mrs. Joseph, and success should have secured her indulgence. She saw her own daughters growing up into tall, elegant, accomplished girls, while Mary Willingham expanded into a gawkey, ungainly being, bearing singular corroboration, in personal appearance, of her Bodham descent; and the young heir of the Court was not more distinguished by his beauty and graceful demeanour, than was the unhappy Charles of the Rectory by his sneaking air

and contracted countenance. The cousins, indeed, were seldom together; but when occasionally brought into comparison, it was "Hyperion to a satyr" in favour of the youthful beauties of the elder branch.

Fortune at length appeared to grow disgusted by the ungracious manner in which her benefits were acknowledged, and to desert the altars on which the incense of gratitude was so scantily offered. Lady Maria, who was exceedingly anxious for the birth of a second boy, became the mother, a year after her husband's accession to his title, to a third girl; and her only consolation under the disappointment was, that at the same time a similar dispensation was inflicted upon the Rectory. In truth, the grand motive for her anxiety to produce a younger son, was to preclude the possibility of the rich living of Heddeston descending to Joseph's representatives. She was a thorough Graspall; and, like Napoleon, would scarcely have consented to become King of England, unless she could have been anointed Archbishop of Canterbury at the same time.

Sir Charles was, as usual, provokingly patient under the misfortune. He was satisfied that his new daughter would grow up as lovely and as intelligent as her sisters; and, choosing to fancy that she already bore a remarkable resemblance to her mother (whom, by a wonderful stretch of the imagination, he firmly believed to be the best of wives,) he resolved that she should be christened *Maria*. The appellation was soon found to be productive of family confusion; and, in defiance of her baptismal rights, the youngest Miss Willingham was very soon endowed with the pet name of *Minnie*.

The next disaster, however, which befel the inmates of Heddeston Court, was of a far more serious nature; for it affected the most amiable member of the family, and the vital source of its united prosperity. Sir Charles, who had not been deterred, by his senatorial honours or by his paternal gravity, from the indulgence of his original predilection for field sports, and "the credit of having a good horse in his stable," became at length a martyr to his passion. In the course of the autumn following the birth of his last daughter, a desperate fall in hunting sent him home senseless on the shoulders of four of his tenants; and although, for a long time, the Dodderwells of the country, and Sir Henrys from town, simultaneously pronounced his recovery to be impossible, he was reserved for a far more terrible destiny—he became a cripple for life!—To a "hunter of the hills," lingering years of sofas and inclined planes, liniments and frictions, vials and decoctions, form but a prolongation of earthly torment!

raining had not only redoubled his ardour for all the perilous sports of boyhood, but had debarred him from that very experience which might have diminished their dangers. He was no less sanguine than imprudent, and as unskilled as his very sisters could have been to enjoy the emancipation of a public school; and although by nature a vigorous, manly boy, he unfortunately became the victim of foolish maternal terrors! Before he had been two months at Eton, an accident in a boating party consigned him to a watery grave!—for Lady Maria had never been prevailed on to sanction his learning to swim!

"Poor woman! Her heart was profoundly touched by this first chastisement of her pride! Independently of his heirship, she loved her son more than she had ever been tempted to love any breathing mortal but herself; and even old Lady Monteagle, could she have witnessed her first burst of maternal agony on the arrival of the fatal express, would have refrained from the selfish folly with which she exulted in her own superior wisdom, and in the frequent warnings she had bestowed upon her neighbour's injudicious precautions. "She always saw me give young Stapylford the run of the gamekeeper's lodges, and the command of my stable; but Lady Maria would take neither example nor advice."

Sir Charles appeared, at first, to be spared the worst consciousness of the loss he had sustained; for he listened to its announcement with that vague smile of imbecility, so awful on the countenance of a strong man in the prime of life. But when little Minnie came weeping to his arms in her black weeds, and when he saw himself surrounded by his accustomed attendants in their sable vesture, he gave a piteous half-infantine shriek, which seemed to mark a sudden sensibility to the event. He asked no questions, however, and uttered no further lamentations. But he never held up his miserable head again; and within a month after the untimely death of his son, he was laid beside him in the family vault of the Willinghams!

If anything could tend to increase the wretchedness of a wife and a mother thus suddenly bereaved, that of Lady Maria might very reasonably be aggravated by the knowledge that her three daughters were unprovided for—that she had nothing to expect from the liberality of Sir Joseph—and that her own jointure did not exceed twelve hundred a-year! Her immediate anxiety was to quit the scene of her past glories and present mortification. Claudia was nearly thirteen, and Eleanor scarcely a year her junior. Both might derive considerable advantage by completing their education on the Continent; and she felt that she should escape the spectacle of Sophia's accession to the throne of Heddeston, by a tem-

porary residence abroad. Now this proposition was a most unexpected relief to the mind of Sir Joseph; and partly moved by gratitude, and partly by some natural feelings of regard towards his worthy brother's memory, he actually proposed to take charge, during her absence, of little Minnie, who was too young to be a pleasant travelling companion; and went the still further length of presenting his three nieces with a deed of annuity for a hundred pounds per annum apiece! Three hundred a-year was an immense concession from a man like Joseph!

All these favours were reluctantly but graciously accepted by the humbled Lady Maria. Two months afterwards, she sailed for France with her two beautiful girls, deeply intent upon pr[redacted] for their future aggrandizement; but thinking litt[redacted] child she left behind, or of the grave of that husband of her youth, who had loved and valued her so much beyond her deserts.

CHAPTER V.

Elle n'aime ni sa patrie, ni ses enfans, ni ceux qui lui ont donné le jour; elle ne connoit d'autre parenté que la fortune.

CARACTERS DE DION CHRYSOSTOME.

It is astonishing with what facility selfish people can transfer such affections as they have to bestow, to the objects best calculated to advance their interests and favour their views. I have already acknowledged that, for twelve long years, Lady Maria Willingham had maintained an extraordinary insensibility towards her daughters; and that, without reference to their prior claim upon her maternal tenderness, she had remained indifferent to the expansion of Claudia's surpassing loveliness, and Eleanor's brilliant abilities. But scarcely had the grave closed upon her noble boy—upon the mainspring of all her hopes, and all her ambition—when the word "connexion," whispered in her ear by old Lady Monteagle in the course of her first neighbourly visit of condolence, produced a singular revolution in the worldly mind of the calculating mother.

"I trust to your prudence, my dear Lady Maria," the sagacious Dowager had observed, "not too remain abroad *too* long. In four years your eldest girl will be presentable; and with her beauty, and the accomplishments she will acquire in her residence abroad, think what a *connexion* she may form in England—think what an advantage her early marriage may prove to the rest of her family."

It was Lady Maria's vidual cue to be silent and pensive; and howbeit she listened with startled consciousness, she continued to shake her well-frilled head, and to fix her downcast gaze upon her own weepers.

"For the sake of your helpless children, my dear friend," resumed Lady Monteagle, "you must learn to moderate your amiable sensibility, and to exert yourself. When I lost poor dear Lord M.—it is full thirty years ago, but I remember it as well as yesterday—I got into a sad, moping, nervous way: and my family physician, who saw the disadvantage it must be to four grown up daughters to have the spectacle of my hypochondriacism always before their eyes, ordered me to Bath, and prescribed a pint of mulled claret every evening before going to bed. My recovery was miraculous."

"Oh! my dear Lady Monteagle! you have never known what it is to be driven like an outcast from the scene of all your wedded happiness. Heaven knows that, with my children's society, a cottage and competence is all I require; but to forsake the spot where I have enjoyed the perfection of worldly felicity—where—where—" a white pocket-handkerchief, well applied, superseded a world of eloquence.

"Nay, my dearest Lady Maria—my excellent friend," remonstrated the Dowager, laying a skinny grasp upon her arm; "I cannot allow you to indulge in these fruitless reminiscences. It is true that your present trial is deeply afflicting"—she thought of her own comfortable jointure and comfortable dower-house, as she spoke—"but you must look forward to better times. What would have been your feelings, had you been left with three or four unprovided younger sons hanging upon you, instead of those lovely girls?—I consider a handsome daughter as a sort of provision for the rest of her family."

"Alas! my dear friend, *you* have such a sanguine, active mind!—such a masculine understanding!—while I!—"

"You must rally yourself, and assume the fortitude becoming your position. Why now, just look at *my* Margaret; she was nothing to be compared with *your* girls, and see what a match she has made! She is at the head of London society—quite a leader of fashion—a first-rate establishment in town, and a palace you know in Northamptonshire. My girls had not a shilling; they had nothing but birth, and the devil's beauty—*youth*; but before Margaret had been married a year she managed to get off her eldest sister, who had forfeited even *that* claim to admiration—persuaded poor old gouty Sir Cecil Dynevour that she was the best manager in the world; and Marian is now a widow with twelve thousand a-year at her own disposal. The other two girls, to be sure, have hung on hand; but as far as *I* am concerned they are as good as settled. Lady Stapylford has only that one wild

boy to occupy her attention; and whenever her Lord goes to Paris—which is pretty often—or forms a shooting-party on his fenny Cambridgeshire estates, Margaret has her sisters to keep her company during his absence. The rest of the year they usually make out with Lady Dynevour. Since my first daughter made so excellent a connexion, I do assure you that I have never once found myself obliged to pass a season in town at my own expense; and I predict that a day will soon come when *you* will find yourself profiting by the same advantages."

"Excellent connexion—good match—hang on hand—get off—make out—devil's beauty—leader of *ton*—jointure settlements." Claudia and Eleanor Willingham, who had been loitering unperceived over an embroidered frame at the other end of the room, were considerably puzzled by these mysterious phrases. Neither the recollected precepts of their discarded governess, nor the folio edition of Johnson's Dictionary—to which they speedily applied for enlightenment—tended to develope the enigma. They little imagined the long apprenticeship they were about to serve to the horrible calling, of which these words may be regarded as the initiatory cabala; they little suspected that their future destiny was comprehended in the rapid impression produced on the mind of their mother by Lady Monteagle's seemingly incomprehensible harangue. When she rang for her carriage, they simply but silently hailed her departure as a relief from a bore; they knew not to what future bitterness of heart they had been devoted by her prospective counsels. For the present, indeed, they felt only grateful to her for her friendly promises; for she had undertaken to keep an inquisitorial eye upon little Minnie's position in the household of her uncle, and to report progress in a close correspondence. They loved their sister dearly;—every one loved Minnie! (except her mother). But she was only five years old—was already extremely attached to her cousins Charles and Mary; and they felt that she would probable be happier, and certainly far better off by remaining in her early home, with her own nurse, and pets, and gardens to amuse her, than by rambling over France and Italy in search of economy and education with the rest of the family.

With this impression on their minds, the adieus of the elder sisters were as little tinctured with pain or apprehension as those of Minnie herself; who found in their promise of a speedy return all the consolation her little heart required for its first transient tears. Succeeding days, and weeks, and months fortunately tended to confirm their flattering anticipations of her welfare: every letter which reached the travellers from the county of Kent—including the tall straight formal Italian specimen of Dowager penmanship, which

emanated from Monteagle Park—the diffuse and minute epistles in which Sir Joseph set forth his proceedings towards his niece, his estate, and the world in general—and the well-sprawled sheet of foolscap over which the good-natured hand of Charles Willingham was wont to guide that of his little cousin into sundry details respecting nurse Worley's rheumatism, and her own favourite dormice—bore witness to Minnie's happiness, and to the kindness of her uncle and aunt.

With Lady Willingham—for Miss Bodham had now progressed into that sublime supremacy—this kindness was at present exhibited in a passive form. She was at present equally debarred from interfering with Minnie's pleasures, and from enjoying those which her new dignities might have been supposed to heap upon her head. The daughter whose birth had been coeval with that of Lady Maria's last rejected pledge, proved to be a most unfortunate object: miserably deformed, and scarcely less deficient in the powers of the mind than of the body. Yet such is the merciful influence of nature upon a mother's heart, that all the maternal solicitudes of Lady Willingham appeared concentrated in her tender watchfulness over this helpless little being. She had wisely counselled her husband to give up the lease of that splendid mansion in Grosvenor Place, which she regarded as an unappeasable Mammoth that had swallowed up what ought to have been appropriated to savings for daughters' portions by his predecessor.

But the advantages of London medical advice soon prompted her to suggest the purchase of another. The first time that the mighty family wagon—on whose frontal the Christian name of Joseph had been freshly interposed instead of that of Charles, between *Sir* and *Willingham, Bart.*—rumbled with its well-hayed burden along the London road, its unwieldy progress originated no longer in parliamentary duties, or in projects of frivolous pleasure. Lady Willingham would have cared little for the London season, had it not afforded her an opportunity of placing her little afflicted child in the hands of one of those barbarous charlatans, who do not hesitate to affix their torturing irons upon limbs already wasted by the approach of death; or to promise "the benefits of their system" to a frame on which the work of mortal decomposition is already half begun. A sanguine mother is easily deluded by promises so specious; and any one who had looked upon Sophia's eager countenance as it became irradiated by the flattering declarations of the impostor, would have instantly forgiven her all her vulgarity and all her meanness. A good and tender mother is a glorious being. Yes! the ex-Bodham was worth fifty Lady Marias!

It was probably to her cotemporaneous sympathy with the

dying child, that Minnie was principally indebted to her aunt's extraordinary partiality and indulgence. I have said, indeed, that every body loved her: she was one of those buoyant, joyous beings whose presence—like the irradiation of a living sunbeam—confers an indefinite consciousness of pleasure; whose smile and voice and endearments find an unerring way to the heart. She was lovely, it is true, and graceful and intelligent as a child might be; but it was neither her beauty, grace, nor talent which wrought the spell; it was all these, combined with an utter guilelessness of soul—with a total absence of that selfishness which so often deteriorates the caresses of childhood. But she had still another and a surpassing charm in the eyes of Lady Willingham. Accustomed, through her infant companionship with her own father, to the sight of physical misfortune, and to the task of soothing its irritations, her little gladsome footsteps became insensibly moderated as she approached the sick chamber of her cousin, and her little voice hushed into the gentleness becoming its stagnant atmosphere. She would devise a thousand inventions for the amusement of the invalid, or sit for hours in watchful tranquillity beside her couch, while the mother permitted herself to snatch some hasty interval of repose or refreshment; and of all the persons ministering to her aid or comfort, it was Minnie alone whom the sufferer appeared to recognize with grateful pleasure.

Mary Willingham, the elder daughter, was a personage wholly incapable of these kindly demonstrations. She was a girl of singular endowments, of a reflective turn of mind, of strong principles and excellent disposition; but her faults were those of undeniable inheritance. She was demure—calm even to apparent insensibility, and reserved beyond the sanguine prompting of her girlish years. Sharing the general predilection in favour of the adopted inmate of her father's house, she had eagerly bestowed her protection and solicitude and instruction upon little Minnie;—but without endearing the gift by a single fond expression. She would have considered such an indulgence of her feelings as indelicate and unbecoming. She was, in short, a formal, matter-of-fact kind of girl; fulfilling the duties of her education—reverencing her parents, and obeying her governess; but beyond this automatous mode of existence, she did not appear to cherish a single natural impulse.

Her brother Charles, the heir expectant to all the dignities of Heddeston—dignities which, under the present dynasty, were reinforced by the command of considerable monied independence—appeared to be only a refrigerated edition of his impassive sister. In a boy, too, this defect of feeling—this moral ossification of the heart—showed with thrice double deformity; it amounted to an air of sullen selfishness: and

the apparent indifference with which both the one and the other withheld their participation from Lady Willingham's anxious exertions in favour of her crippled child, was pretty generally attributed to a mean jealousy of her maternal partiality. Mrs. Darnham even went so far as to insinuate to her confidantes of the neighbourhood, that Mr. Charles's unusual devotion to his little cousin, arose from an amiable desire to pique and retaliate upon the absurd predilection of his mother.

At length, as might have been reasonably desired by all parties, the afflicted child was released from its mortal thraldom; and Mary and Charles addressed themselves to the task of soothing Lady Willingham's grief with amiable and unostentatious, but ill-directed sympathy. Sir Joseph made divers prolonged harangues to his family upon the duty of submitting, without a murmur, to the dispensations of Providence, which might have suited the birth of the little cripple better than its decease; with every other possible variation of common-place, peculiar to this species of domestic calamity. He assured them that he felt the loss of his daughter to be a sort of counterbalance to the prosperity of his worldly affairs; and having assembled all the domestics of the family, he favoured them with a long and pertinent address upon the brevity and uncertainty of human existence. As Sir Joseph uttered his moralities in a serious and measured voice, and was attired in a customary suit of solemn black, even the foolish, fat scullion herself regarded it as subordinate and dutiful to melt into tears. But certain of the gray-headed coadjutors of Dickinson and Co. could by no means persuade themselves to take warning by the premature fate of their master's unfortunate babe; and many of the matrons of the family secretly determined that the brevity of human existence could not have been more satisfactory exemplified than on the present occasion.

His son and daughter endured his prolixity with their usual respectful submission; and Lady Willingham, long accustomed to his diffuse platitudes, refrained not from her tears at the instigation of Sir Joseph's homily. But little Minnie did much towards her consolation. She would sit with her, book on knee, in silent companionship within the lonely chamber endeared by so many mournful remembrances; or stroll out with her, hand in hand, towards Heddeston church, the sight of which refreshed with renewed tears the memory of her child.

Nor did the lapse of years weaken or destroy this intimate association: she still remained in Lady Willingham's eyes a living memento of what little Sophia could, or should, or might have become; and although, as Mary slowly outgrew the authority of the governess, her little cousin was duly con-

signed to the place she had vacated, Minnie Willingham remained the especial darling and *protegée* of her aunt. Her own daughter was seventeen, and Charles had already risen to some eminence at Eton; yet neither of them had proved or exhibited one moment's envy of the favour bestowed upon their cousin.

From Lady Maria, meanwhile, the most satisfactory letters were periodically received; and nothing could be more plausibly devised than the motives suggested for the prolongation of her residence on the Continent. Financial foresight—an anxiety to accomplish her daughters under the hands of the first masters at an inconsiderable cost—a desire, by present economy, to render their future *debût* in England more brilliant than her available means might command—induced her, she wrote, to forego the company of her beloved little Maria, and to trespass thus unreasonably upon the hospitality of Heddeston Court in her favour. She depicted herself as a martyr to maternal duty; as renouncing her beloved country, the society of her nearest relatives, the sight of a spot associated with hallowed reminiscences of conjugal happiness, for the sake of her elder girls; pathetically lamenting, at the same time, that her narrow income debarred her from the valued privilege of bestowing upon them that solid English education, those excellent principles—instilled and actively exemplified—of rigid English morality, which so well become, and so powerfully sustain, the domestic firesides of our own happy island!"

Sir Joseph, from a fellow-feeling, warmly applauded this well-worn clap-trap. But Lady Willingham, naturally lynx-eyed, and sharpened into fierce acuteness by feelings of rivalry and personal aversion, permitted herself to compare the tendency of these pathetic Jeremiades, with a more natural statement of the case as it flowed from the undesigning pens of Claudia and Eleanor, in their letters to their little sister and their cousin Mary.

On their first arrival at Paris, these letters, indited in a flowing English hand, and with an exuberance of girlish spirits, set forth nothing but their ecstacies at the enchanting novelties by which they were surrounded; and it might plainly be discerned that Lady Maria, despite her widow's weeds of only six months' standing, by no means suffered either herself or her daughters to be overwhelmed with the monotony of wo. She was either unconscious of, or indifferent to, the strict formalities observed on such occasions in France; where it is esteemed a violation of all decorum for a person in family mourning to be seen at any public place.

By degrees, the flowing caligraphy of English penmanship became cramped with the perpendicularity, and curly-tailed z, and s, and r, of the minute handwriting of France;

while the style it served to convey—began to expand into that luxuriant fervency of address which characterizes the epistolary correspondence of our ardent neighbours. In another year, it grew deformed with Gallicisms; in another, it found its way into downright French; and, in the course of a fourth, their residence of a few months in Italy enabled both Claudia and her sister to affect something of a polyglot text.

Still their letters remained extremely amusing, and lively, and natural. It was clear that in spite of the toils of their education—in spite of the music, singing, painting, and Babel-like confusion of tongues of which they complained as a daily infliction—they were made the constant companions and excuse of all their mother's dissipation. Thirty thousand francs per annum form a respectable income on the Continent; and during a season at Florence, and two winters at Naples, Lady Maria found herself enabled to maintain both an equipage and a table, after the fashion of the place. During the Carnival, they spoke of their gaieties as unceasing. At one time there was a masked ball, from which the English Ambassadress would not hear of their absence; at another, their Mamma had been prevailed on to let them fill some juvenile parts in amateur theatricals. Their Parisian experience was of such high account in *proverbes*, *charades*, and *tableaux*, that on such occasions they could not be spared. In short, upon some plea or other, they appeared to have found their way into society at an age when the nursery or the school-room should have been the shelter of their inexperience; and they anticipated being presented and "coming out" in England, while it was evident that for some time past they had never been *in*.

At length the long-appointed period arrived! Claudia, who was now eighteen, and who had conditioned that her sister should make her first appearance in London the same season with herself, wrote to announce their immediate arrival. A house was taken for them in a third-rate situation, such as Lady Maria's limited income might justify; and Minnie, who had accompanied her uncle and aunt to their own formal mansion in Grosvenor-square, to await the event, had at length the gratification of a picturesque embrace from her long absent mother, and a thousand fervent and tearful caresses from her two lovely sisters.

Lady Willingham was duly and appropriately thanked; Mary was presented with her set of Roman mosaic and Neapolitan coral; and Sir Joseph's hand was affectionately squeezed by the grateful Lady Maria. As she looked round, however, upon the humble comforts of an abode which the recent habitation of an Italian palace and a Parisian hotel endowed with a somewhat homely air, she could not but

think that her brother-in-law might have seized on so auspicious an occasion as that of the *entrée* of his nieces into society, to expand into something of a more liberal vein. It would have been so easy for him to engage, on his own account, a house for the season, more becoming to the name of Willingham, and more advantageous to the views of the fair *débutantes*. There is nothing so injudicious as to fight in a matrimonial skirmish under ensigns of poverty.

CHAPTER VI.

What are these wondrous civilizing arts—
This Roman polish?

ADDISON.

"WELL, dear Mamma!" exclaimed Claudia to Lady Maria, having elevated her glass to take a deliberate survey of the apartments, immediately on the departure of Sir Joseph and his family.

"Well, my dear girls! can you conceive anything more mortifyingly beggarly than the whole affair?"

"And this," observed Eleanor, drawing her chair towards the fire place, and establishing her feet after a fashion which might have evoked the shade of her grandsire from the Heddeston vault—"And this is the sea-coal fire—the *comfortable* chimney-corner—for which I have so often heard you sigh in Italy!—These are the snug rooms I have heard you regret!—This blanket of dingy woollen is the capital carpet, the remembrance of which rendered our clean and well-waxed *parquets* insupportable! I wish you joy, dear Mamma, of your inauguration among all these blessings; but not without some little surprise at the preference."

"Oh! you must not compare the attractions of dirty London lodgings with those of our excellent mansion in Grosvenor-place, or with the comforts of Heddeston. All this I acknowledge to be detestable; and did I imagine, my dear girls, that you were likely to find your permanent homes of the same degraded and miserable character, I should not hesitate to fly back to Paris with greater speed than that which brought us hither. Mediocrity in England is a worse than insupportable destiny; and the luxuries assigned to poverty itself on the Continent, offer a far preferable alternative. But believe me also, that there exists no station in life, from one end of Europe to the other, which will bear comparison with the splendour and refinement of the highest class of English society;—in which, before long, I trust to see you both advantageously placed."

"I fear you are too sanguine. At Paris, and in Naples success in society is far more easily attained than I can believe it to be in this wide wilderness of London, where there are so many formidable competitors."

"My dear Eleanor!—everything will depend upon yourselves. With a little management on your parts, and vigilance on mine, there is every probability that you will both make excellent matches. Your connexions on both sides are excellent;—you have just as much beauty and accomplishment as is requisite for attraction;—the English connexions and friendships you have formed abroad are all in your favour;—and you have been preceded here by the reputation of having refused several good matches in Italy."

"Thanks to your generalship, Mamma! I am convinced that both the Duca di Alcastora, and Claudia's Piedmontese Prince, were satisfied by your style of living that we had very tolerable fortunes; and that, on their enlightenment, the preliminaries of either marriage would not have proceeded far. On the profit-and-loss alliance system of the Continent, we could never, in fact, have formed even a respectable connexion among foreigners."

"A principal motive for my return to England—the only European land of disinterested love! In France you must have expected, at best, to be chosen by way of '*ménagères*'—to inspect the *lessive* and *confitures*."

"I really feel at present," observed the indolent Claudia, looking round the dingy and dismantled chamber, "as if I should prefer the *lessive*, and all its domestic accompaniments of joyous gaiety, to the atmosphere of this desolate England. I am positively chilled into a moral ague."

"Patience! my dear child! patience!—To-morrow everything will wear a different aspect. A few flowers placed about the room will enliven it beyond your recognition; then we can strew all these unmeaning tables with your *étrennes* of the year—with our new caricatures—and a few Neapolitan novelties, which will attract the gaping curiosity of our visitors—and will serve, like a showy domino on an ugly woman, to disguise the nakedness of the land. Oh! it will all do very well in a day or two; before I send round my cards, and sound my tocsin to the little circle of exclusive fashion by which I intend to surround myself, all will go well."

"Don't you think Minnie is growing very pretty, Mamma?" inquired Claudia with a yawn.

"You must remember, my dear, that you saw her in contrast with Mary Willingham; who remains, as she ever was, a flagrant instance of the awkwardness of 'nature's journeymen.' When Minnie is once settled at home, depend on it, we shall find her full of awkward Missishness; she only

looked pretty to-night, because she was flushed and animated by our arrival."

"Oh! pardon me!" interrupted Eleanor. "Her features are extremely delicate, and her figure slight, and well-turned, and graceful. I was most agreeably surprised; and could not refrain from expressing the feeling to Mary, who replied that she was the most interesting little girl in the world. I almost forgave her own awkwardness, she seemed so unaffectedly fond of poor Minnie."

"I detest interesting little girls!" exclaimed Lady Maria pettishly; "and I am only too sure that we shall find her miserably *de trop* in our arrangements; for she is too old to be left with the servants, and I cannot afford a governess. However, even if the Willinghams were inclined to keep her—which evidently they are *not*—it would have a very strange appearance were I to leave her longer in their hands. Therefore, all things considered, I think I shall look out for a school on a limited scale, where I can send her to be safe, and out of the way."

Poor Minnie! And it was to the return of relations such as these she had looked with such confiding affection; it was of the caresses of this calculating mother, of these critical sisters, she had been dreaming for months, and only waking to anticipations of a yet more fervent reality.—Poor little Minnie!—her disappointment was great indeed; and when she returned home from her first chilling interview with her nearest relations, her sleepless pillow—and seldom is the pillow of childhood sleepless—was visited by sore misgivings for the future, by many self-rebukings for the ingratitude which had hitherto withheld her unqualified affection from those, under whose fosterhood her recent years had passed so happily, so fearlessly away. She had scarcely allowed her little heart to indulge, to the full extent of its wishes, her love for Charles and Mary, her gratitude towards Sir Joseph and her aunt. She had checked herself repeatedly by those watchwords of duty, "My *own* mother—my *own* sisters;" and now, when she found that mother and those sisters so moderately inclined to sanction her eager claims, she could no longer venture to bestow her rejected affections upon the objects from whom she had previously laboured to estrange the gift.

Minnie was only fourteen years old, and was by no means endowed with a precocity of worldly wisdom; but she had sense and sensibility enough to regard with terror her approaching removal from a home wherein she had been so long and so indulgently domesticated. She had too just and too amiable a sense of things to interrogate Charles and Mary—on all other occasions her oracles and bosom counsellors—touching their opinion of the conduct of her own family, or

her prospects of happiness; she was fully conscious that the topic should remain sacred to her lips and ears.

A single week, passed in Seymour-street, served but to confirm Minnie Willingham's apprehensions and painful recoil upon herself. She experienced the daily and vexatious trial of hearing the friends she so tenderly esteemed, and who had in fact so worthily won the gratitude of her heart, held up to the most unsparing ridicule. Her sister Eleanor was an admirable mimic; and her delineations of Lady Willingham's prim self-concentration, of Sir Joseph's diffuse and common-place prose, appeared to form the sole amusement of their dull family re-union. Even this Minnie might have taught herself to endure; but when she saw Mary —her dear and indulgent cousin Mary—portrayed with all the twitchings of her habitual nervousness, with the miraculously awkward gait which her timidity assumed before strangers, and with the blush and struggling speech which had prefaced her replies to the invidious questions of her cousins—she could not repress her honest indignation. It was in vain, however, that she put forth a claim to forbearance, in Mary's affectionate protection of herself; it was in vain she urged against their satires that Mary, in spite of her *gaucherie*, was in truth remarkably accomplished and well-informed.

"*Il se peut qu'elle ne manque pas d'instruction*," replied Eleanor; "but the word accomplishment embraces a wide field; and I tell you the poor girl is a mere savage. I have no doubt she has been brought up according to the most approved system of the Bodhamites; but I tell you she is a savage."

"Mary has had the best masters in London, for several years past. She is a scientific musician, paints in oil, is mistress of French and German——"

"All which tends to justify my declaration—that she is a savage! Science in amateur music is decidedly barbarous; oil-painting is an unseemly and impertinent pretension on the part of a female artist; and as to her qualifications as a linguist,

> She speaks the French of Stratford school, by Bow—
> The French of Paris she did never know,

and a woman of fashion might as well talk Iroquois as German. Yes, Mary Willingham is decidedly, and upon the most approved principles—a savage."

"Poor cousin Mary! had she passed a year or two in the land where poodles are taught to dance, and cooks and hairdressers are termed artists, no doubt she would have a better title to your approbation," cried Minnie, stung to the quick

by the malicious comments of her sisters. But this imprudent sally sealed her own destiny. Lady Maria affected to be shocked by her flippancy and insubordination; and within a week, the seminary, "on a limited scale," was hastily selected; Minnie and her trunks were securely deposited there as animate and inanimate lumber, which might very well be spared from Seymour-street; while her mother and sisters began to enjoy, unmolested, their own witty enmity against her former benefactors.

Lady Willingham, meanwhile, was particularly gratified by this apparent alteration in her young *protegée's* destiny. Despite the icy listlessness of her middle age, she was not an unobservant woman; prosperity and adversity had equally tended to soften her heart; the brilliancy of her position in life had served to expand the original narrowness of her mind; the faults of her youthful temper were somewhat moderated, and she had already detected so much that was mischievous in the character of her sister-in-law, so much that was objectionable in the acquired tone of her nieces, that she rejoiced to know her little favourite was secure, for the present, from the evil influence of their example.

Mary, however, was more charitable, or less discerning. She was wonderfully impressed with the elegance and graces of her travelled cousins; and was herself of so ingenuous and liberal a disposition, that it never occurred to her to suspect the existence of inferior qualities beneath so specious a surface. Modestly, though silently, conscious of her own personal defects, she admired their beauty, their foreign graces, their trifling accomplishments, nor deemed it possible that they could have been left wholly ignorant, in all those unavailing branches of education which were likely to remain inostensible. Eleanor, indeed, who was gifted with brilliant abilities, had contrived to pick up some curious stores of general information in an unchecked course of desultory reading; but Claudia, with her music and her miniatures, her melting Roman intonation, and the polished Parisian idiom, remained a dunce of the first water. As to moral principle, both were equally in a state of mental darkness. To form good connexions, maintain a good appearance in society on small means, and obtain the greatest portion of amusement for the least possible quantity of sordid expenditure, were the only duties hitherto inculcated by the maternal instructions of Lady Maria.

"I really wonder," observed Sir Joseph Willingham to his lady, as he sat sipping a fiery vinous decoction called Port, some weeks after the arrival of his late brother's family, "that Lady Maria, with her very limited income, should have made up her mind to settle in London. I can understand her finding herself thoroughly tired of the dirty com-

fortless ways of the Continent; but I should really have thought that Bath or Brighton, or Cheltenham, or some cheap watering-place, where amusement may be had at a reasonable rate, and no horses are required, would have far better suited her purpose: but, as I always say, it is useless to attempt deciding on the views of other people."

"Oh! as to Lady Maria's views, they are far more evident than easy to influence. London is the most profitable matrimonial market, and London must therefore forward her speculations, at any cost."

"But my nieces might have made a very comfortable match at Brighton. She herself picked up my brother at Ramsgate."

"Considering her moderate jointure, and her daughters' want of fortune, I doubt whether Lady Maria considers her own marriage a favourable precedent. For her girls, at all events, she entertains much higher pretensions; and she is so far justifiable, that they certainly boast a degree of beauty and elegance such as, in her best days, never fell to *her* share. I suspect she intends them to form very splendid alliances; to effect which, she has certainly chosen the most advantageous ground."

"Why yes," said Sir Joseph, looking complacently round his gloomy dining-room, "all men of distinction may certainly be found in the metropolis at one time or other of the year: and they are right—they would otherwise exile themselves beyond the limits of the spread of knowledge and the march of intellect. Do you know, my dear Sophia, if *I* were to remain at Heddeston myself all the year round, I really think I should end with becoming a very dull fellow."

Lady W. sneered over her dried cherries; while Mary, after playing with her spoon a minute or two, to disguise her embarrassment, observed, "And Lady Maria has so many personal connexions in town, so many noble relatives, who will of course assist in forwarding her views!"

"When her little girl was left isolated in England, I never perceived that any of her Ladyship's illustrious clan troubled themselves to show her the least civility, unless it were old General de Vesci and his somniferous wife; and I am sure, during poor Sir Charles's time, Heddeston Court used to be filled from September till March with nothing but De Vescis and Lorimers."

"Lorimers?"

"Old Lady De Vesci was a Lorimer."

"Any relation to Charles's Eton friend?"

"Grand aunt, I believe."

"Ah! I dare say she will find all these people civil enough as far as occasionally chaperoning her daughters, or

giving them opera-tickets, or the pattern of a dress," said Sir Joseph.

"Or lending their carriage to Lady Maria," significantly interposed Lady Willingham, with an interrogatory glance at her husband.

"If you mean, Sophia, that her Ladyship is likely to consider *mine* at her disposal, I beg to observe that she deceives herself altogether. If she chooses to gratify her own vanity by settling in London on fifteen hundred a-year, (for I leave her the full allowance for my three nieces, although I undertake Minnie's school-expenses as if she were a child of our own)——"

"And so she *is*," said both Lady W. and Mary in a low tone.

"Why it is solely her own affair. In that three hundred a-year she must be aware that I have done my utmost—ay! and as the father of a family, more than many would have done, considering the slights she marked towards us all during Sir Claude's and Sir Charles's lifetime. I trust I understand my duty towards the widow of my brother," continued Sir Joseph, solemnly, "and I trust I have strength of mind faithfully to fulfil it; but as to having my horses out night and day to please her, it is a thing I will never do—*never!* I consider it incumbent upon every man—more especially one who has officiated as a Christian minister—to be unceasing in his tender mercies towards the brute creation. What is it Cowper says——"

"Never mind what Cowper says; in this instance your own opinions and determination are far more to the purpose."

"Well, my dear! *my* determination is that *you* may take Lady Maria or my nieces out shopping whenever it suits you (except into the City or the Strand of a Monday, on account of scratching the carriage against the market wagons); but if she should ever take the liberty of applying for my equipage as an independent loan, you will have the goodness to reply, that it is entirely against my principles to distress my horses: and you may add, Sophia"—and he looked askance over his wine-glass to see how the assertion *took* with his spouse—"that I am tolerably positive in my opinions, when they have been once seriously formed. You know I refused Mary and yourself the gratification of the Wenster archery meeting last year, because Anthony thought the horses wanted physicing, and that the pull was too great."

"Very true," replied Lady Willingham mildly, and with a full remembrance that the objection had arisen entirely on her *own* part. "But you need not make yourself prematurely uneasy, my love, for the De Vescis have taken a house in Portman-square to be near Lady Maria; and you know the

General has a superb set of horses, and several carriages, and——"

"Mighty absurd! for his fortune at the utmost is ten thousand a-year! which does not go far, where there is a place in the country, a borough, and a house in town to be kept up. To be sure the General is not a family man, which *I* find to my cost makes a considerable difference in one's calculations."

"Then old Lady Monteagle is in town this year, with her daughter Lady Dynevour. They have both carriages, and can occupy but one."

"Ay, ay! But you will find that neither of them will be very solicitous to lend the other to Lady Maria Willingham. You women understand one another's manœuvres so well;—you know so perfectly what it is to keep a pair of wretched horses shivering in the cold, while you are tumbling over drawers of ribbons which you never intend to buy, and matching silks which you have already purchased at some other shop;—to say nothing of hearing them eough in the street half the night, while you are finishing your toilet, or engaged with a last half hour of scandal at some Dowager's rout." Sir Joseph chuckled, for he felt that he had been more than commonly witty and eloquent.

"And then, you know, Sophia, an old woman like Lady Monteagle is always under the dominion of a parcel of gray-headed servants; and you are well aware that her ladyship no more dare ask either of her drunken footmen, or her fat coachman, to go out at night, than she dare venture herself. It is not every one who is so thoroughly the master of his establishment as *I* am."

"Very true, my dear. By the way, Mary, what did your brother's last letter say about young Stapylford?—How has he got out of his last scrape?—I met Lady Monteagle this morning in Seymour-street, who was very anxious to learn how her grandson had escaped."

"As usual, no doubt, upon other people's shoulders," observed Sir Joseph.

"I fancy papa, is right," replied Mary, mildly. "Charles's account of the business is so very confused, so different from his usual clear style of letter-writing, that I am persuaded Mr. Stapylford was rescued in this instance, as he has often been before, by my brother and Lorimer uniting to pay the damage. Lord Stapylford is so very shabby with his son, that it would be useless to apply at home on such occasions."

"I wonder what Charles, or any one else, sees to like in that young man."

"It often surprises *me*," said Mary. "He is continually disgracing himself by some mad-cap folly or other; and yet

the wisest and most amiable of his companions always appear willing to become a sacrifice for him."

"I am glad to hear *you* talk so of Mr. Stapylford, my dear Mary," said Sir Joseph, with an air of paternal authority. "I have sometimes doubted whether I were quite wise in having such a wild young man so much at Heddeston."

"*Young man!* my dear papa!" exclaimed Mary, with a blush; "Stapylford is a year younger than my brother, and two years younger than Lorimer or myself. I do not believe he is sixteen till next year. If there is anything to fear, it is for poor Minnie; you know he always calls her his little wife."

"Yes, while he provokes her by cutting off her doll's head, or her spaniel's ears."

"I think the 'little wife' system a very bad one," said Sir Joseph solemnly. "If the alliance is really eligible, that sort of premature notice is always sure to put a stop to it; and it only serves, when the girl and boy are grown up, to embarrass them in each other's presence. I remember, when I was a stripling, Lady Monteagle always persisted in calling her daughter Margaret *my* little wife; and long after I was engaged to you, Sophia, my father used to make Miss Margaret and myself stand up together, to see which of the young couple was the tallest. Now, do you know, I cannot help fancying that Lady Stapylford blushes whenever I speak to her to this very day."

Lady Willingham, who was well aware that the fair Margaret—a thorough-going Almack's woman of fashion—had not blushed for twenty years, to be visible through her rouge, and who was by no means fond of hearing her own clandestine engagement alluded to in her daughter's presence, took this *historiette* as a cue for removal to the drawing-room, leaving Sir Joseph to deposit his long thin legs on the marble chimney-piece, in a meditative attitude, becoming the anxious after-dinner solitude of "a father of a family." At present his thoughts were exclusively occupied in conjecturing by what means Lady Maria Willingham and her daughters had become so extremely intimate with the Duke of Lisborough as to be invited to Calmersfield for the ensuing Easter holidays;—with an occasional stray digression towards the choice of a private tutor for his son Charles, who had recently removed from Eton to Oxford.

CHAPTER VII.

It is one thing to understand persons, and another thing to understand matters; for many are perfect in men's humours, that are not greatly capable of the real parts of business, which is the constitution of one who hath studied men more than books.

BACON'S ESSAYS.

IN the Duke of Lisborough's intimacy with the family of his late brother, there was, however, nothing that need have puzzled the comprehension of so sagacious a person as Sir Joseph Willingham. His Grace was a frequent traveller; had sojourned repeatedly in Paris, Florence, Rome, and Naples, during Lady Maria's settlement in those cities. He found her current in the very best society of each; he knew her to be as well connected as himself, and, in some remote degree, with himself; and, moreover, during their more recent acquaintance, he had discovered her to be the mother of two lovely girls—elegant, accomplished, fascinating—everything in short which his bachelor predilections could desire. It was very natural that he should rejoice to hear they were about to settle in their native country; it was still more so that he should express a hope of seeing them frequently at Calmersfield Park. He had, in short, a long arrear of hospitality to repay to Lady Maria.

But the worthy proprietor of Heddeston Court was by no means the only person to whom the ensuing Easter visit afforded matter of surprise and speculation. The Duke of Lisborough had a married brother and a widowed sister, who kept vigilant watch and ward over the female arrivals at Calmersfield; and as both were equally British fixtures, and equally unversed in the fashionable currency of the Continent, neither Lord Robert Lorton nor Lady Grayfield were at first prepared to admit Lady Maria's justifiable claims to the attentions of their illustrious kinsman. No sooner had they managed to discover that she had two daughters, very handsome and very poor, than some degree of indignation mingled with their astonishment; but, as they had ascertained at the same time that Lady Maria was a De Vesci, their own distant kinswoman, they perceived that it would be impossible, or indecent, to manœuvre her out of her invitation. The poor Duke very naturally, but very superfluously, believed himself to be master of his own house. But

this is a domestic point on which others, besides Sir Joseph Willingham, are apt to deceive themselves.

Meanwhile, Lady Maria, unsuspicious of the consternation excited by her approach, proceeded to weave her plots in utter unconsciousness of the Argus eyes which waited on their developement. At the appointed period, Mademoiselle Céline contrived to adjust in a capacious imperial the *bérets* and *chapeaux parés de Miladi*, without infringing on the more important claims of the young ladies' ball-dresses and *canezous*—exquisite in their elaborate simplicity. Their newest music, including a *Romance à deux voix*, composed for them by Blangini, and a Mazurka, with an impossible name, forwarded to them at Paris by some Polish Count—their *ex-cavaliere* of a former season—was duly deposited in its golden-hinged morocco port-folio; while their mother-of-pearl work-boxes were furnished with unfinished specimens of *broderie*, whose delicacy might have brought down on either fair Arachne the vengeance of Minerva;—unless the suggestion of one of their most beloved and confidential friends were correct—that these *chef d'œuvres* of the needle had been purchased of an indigent *brodeuse* of the *Rue Vivienne*.

Certain it was, that during their residence at Calmersfield, not a single leaf, not the petal of a flower, was added to the performance; but then the Miss Willinghams were in such popular request! They were always wanted in the music-room, or the ball-room, or the billiard-room; to-day the Duke insisted upon driving Claudia through the neighbouring villages in his *droski*; to-morrow Eleanor was selected as the companion of a "capability" walk, to decide upon the site of a kiosk, which it was his intention to construct in an elevated position of the gardens. Sometimes he had a cabinet of cameos to display—for what English nobleman escapes from Rome unbitten by epidemic connoisseurship, and unduped by the cognoscenti?—Sometimes, on a rainy day, a new cotillion was to be practised in the dancing-gallery; and one or other of Lady Maria's daughters was sure to be selected as his partner.

The girls themselves, with all that sanguine expectation and fearless enjoyment of passing pleasure, which is co-existent only with extreme youth, valued his preference solely for the amusement and variety it insured to them in their daily pursuits; and even Lady Maria presumed not to hazard a hope that all this favour and intimacy would tend to any further advantage than a *début* in London of especial brilliancy. She was well aware that Calmersfield had long been regarded as a sort of *conservatoire* of fashion—an university of *ton*, wherein young ladies might take degrees, calculated to maintain their future reputation in the *beau monde*; and she was duly anxious that the honours thus attained by her

accomplished daughters, should be of the highest order. But neither Lady Grayfield nor Lord Robert gave her credit for this compulsory moderation; they believed her to be intent on crowning her fair offspring with strawberry-leaves rather than with laurel!

Claudia and Eleanor, meanwhile, even had they been aware of the mistrustful and angry feelings thus excited against them, would have still maintained that courteous and buoyant animation which constituted the principal charm of their character and demeanour. Among the numerous arts they had learned on the Continent—and among them all it was, perhaps, the only one conducive to their personal happiness—was that of utter indifference to *les misères*—or those trifling grievances which form the daily and delightful grumbling-block of so many of our countrywomen. "*Pour porter légèrement la vie*," says a French proverb, "*il faut savoir glisser sur bien des choses!*" Even frivolity has its axioms of philosophy; and strives to replace, by a degree of *pococurante* levity, the more humble Christian virtue of patience.

"I suspect Lady Grayfield does not like us," observed Eleanor Willingham to Lady Robert Lorton. "But what does her approbation signify? With the Duke's *engouement* in our favour, and *your* friendship, dear Lady Robert, I am perfectly careless what that animated matter-of-fact feels towards us, or thinks about us."

"You do yourselves justice," replied Lady Robert—the most fascinating little coquette in the world. "At your age you have no right to distract yourselves with plans, and projects, and worldly foresight; leave them to Lady Maria as her own especial province; and enjoy the sunshine of life as long as its clouds will let you. Lord Robert and his sister delight in perplexing the brightest moments of existence by all the agonies of second sight; and are quite indignant when they find my sympathy waiting the actual occurrence of evil. I hate to turn back my head towards the dark shadow that follows me; or direct my telescope towards a coming storm."

"And I," said Eleanor, "have at present seen so little of the miseries of life, that I trouble myself as lightly with apprehension as with my last night's dreams."

"My dear child, one season of English fogs will reform your sin of light-heartedness altogether: I fear you will find, by dreary experience, that cheerful animation is regarded among us as a very malignant symptom. In other countries, virtue is depicted as a smiling nymph, with frank joyous eyes and gladsome footsteps; in Great Britain, she is typified as a doughty spinster, tricked in antique ruff and bonnet, starched pinners, and a rueful and mortified countenance."

"Her eloquence must be mighty indeed, if, under such a guise, she can continue to increase her train of proselytes."

"Oh! we blindfold our children in their infancy, and stimulate them by the hope of reward—by the sugar-plums of selfishness—to walk uprightly over the burning ordeal. My girls, like their foolish mother, are blest by nature with a very merry temperament; but they are not allowed to laugh after they are five years old. The Duke, and Lord Robert, and Lady Grayfield, assure me that to be amused is a plebeian privilege; and they have provided a governess for my urchins, who is careful to train them up in fitting habits of well-bred solemnity. As to the dear Duke, he has ventured somewhat nearer to the equator indeed, than the rest of his frozen family; and has Neapolitanized himself into a taste for guitars and smiling faces—the Carnival and the Willinghams; but its costs Robert and his sister a world of pains to refrigerate him, on his return, into the dulness of phlegmatic indolence becoming the head of the house of Lisborough."

"But why does not Lady Grayfield satisfy herself with drilling her own children, and Lord Robert with training up his—not in the way they should go—but in the way they should stand still?—Why cannot they allow the Duke to amuse himself according to his own fancy, or as *they*, perhaps, may choose to consider it—his folly?"

"In the first place, it is the mania of the Lisborough family to believe that the eyes of the whole earth are fixed upon their proceedings; and that, from the days of Noah until now, their illustrious dynasty has remotely influenced the destinies of every quarter of the globe. Then Robert—who really persuades himself that he is very anxious his brother should marry—frets himself into a fever of consternation whenever he fancies that the wish is threatened with realization, by anything approaching to a real flirtation on poor Lisborough's part; and as to Lady Grayfield—although it evidently matters very little to *her* eldest son whether Calmersfield be ever menaced with a Duchess and an heir apparent—she has been so long accustomed to manage her brother, and do the honours of himself and his possessions, that she entertains an instinctive hatred towards all the young ladies with whom he dances, and all the Dowagers with whom he dines. I was apprehensive that her Gorgon brow would have petrified poor Lady Maria last night, when the Duke took the second to your *Notturno*."

"She may calm all her alarms on my account," said Eleanor, scornfully. "I do not deny my predilection in favour of the splendours and luxuries of Calmersfield, and his Grace's many treasures of magnificence; but not for all these, and more, would I encounter the life of solemnity which will befall his wife. There is so much of *tête-à-tête* in

English matrimony, that it cannot be measured by emblazoned parchments—by a golden balance, and diamond weights, as we manage such matters on the Continent; the disposition and qualities of the future husband must be thrown into the scale."

"Oh! Lisborough has excellent qualities; he is good-tempered, and generous, and honourable. I am very fond of him, except on state occasions, when he acts the *grand Seigneur*, and grows a bore.'

"Claudia thinks him the wonder of the century. If Lord Robert has anything to apprehend for his son, it is from *her;* but for me, he is much too formal. And now tell me, dearest Lady Robert, how is it that Lady Grayfield, who you say is so tenacious of her influence, and so jealous of the Duke's regard, chances to be fond of *you*, who are his favourite beyond all rivalship."

"Oh! all Charlotte's loves and courtesies are calculated by the most approved tables of interest. I was an heiress, you are to know, and as well descended as herself; so she spared neither effort nor blandishment to secure my marriage with her younger brother. She thought me a good match for Robert, and it was quite diverting to see how desperately she fell in love with me. After my marriage, without pretending to any skill in sorcery, I very soon found her out; and not being of a mysterious temper, made no secret of the discovery. But not angrily—I only laughed at all her little manœuvres, which she did not like; and made Lisborough laugh—which she liked still less."

"And thus you proceeded to open warfare!"

"On the contrary; I remained as pacific as a herald! Charlotte has her weaknesses like the rest of us; but in common with all the Lorton family, she has sterling qualities to form the counterbalance. So when I saw her vexed by my *persiflage*, I left off laughing, both actively and reflectively; for I only keep this sort of irony in *reserve*, as the most efficient weapon of defence practicable against the solemn high mightinesses of the earth."

"Then you still believe that it is fear which makes her so loving?"

"No; I give her credit for a better feeling on the present occasion. She is extremely attached to Robert, as belonging to the Lisborough dynasty; and to my children, as being Lortons by right of inheritance; and seeing that *they* all love me, and that I make them all happy, she honours me with a sort of collateral affection herself. But I am persuaded Lady Grayfield's original motive for preferring me as a sister-in-law, and tolerating Lisborough's partiality, was her observation of my indifference to the distinction. She saw that I would not be at the trouble of a manœuvre to secure a dia-

dem; and that I left the coveted task of managing the Duke and his civil list entirely at her disposal;—that all the little dirty patronage of trinkets from Rundell's, presentations to livings, seats in parliament or seats in opera-boxes, was a matter of indifference to my indolent nature; and, satisfied that she has nothing to lose by my rivalship, she allows Lisborough to like me as much as he pleases. I am one of the few people, you know, whom it is quite impossible for him to marry. And now let us commence our toilet; for you are to understand that among the deadliest sins of omission and commission, according to his Grace's estimate, is that of being too late for dinner."

The whole of this edifying conversation was duly unfolded by Eleanor to her sister, when the hair had been curled, and Mademoiselle Céline dismissed that very night. But Claudia was in high spirits; intoxicated with the increasing homage of the Duke of Lisborough, she would listen to no remonstrances. She was neither inclined to suspect Lord Robert, nor to dread Lady Grayfield.

"Depend on it, dear Eleanor," pleaded the sanguine girl, "brothers and sisters have a very moderate influence in such cases. The Duke may consult Lady Grayfield about new furnishing his saloon at Calmersfield, or Lord Robert about the equipage which he tells me Adams is building for him; but it is precisely because he has no wife to whose better taste to refer. If his heart were once really touched, be assured that it would speak too loudly to admit of their further interference."

"If his heart were really touched! But consider for a moment the difficulty of touching a heart that has been concentrated and wrapped up in long years of selfish independence! The Duke has been so accustomed to find his pleasures and inclinations regarded as a first object, and to hear the attentions of unmarried women pointed out to his mistrust, that those instances of personal regard and preference, which might flatter and attach another man, must have become disgusting to himself."

"Nevertheless," said Claudia, looking complacently round the gilded panels and refulgent mirrors of the dressing-room—"nevertheless, dear Nelly, 'tis a stake worth playing for. I like the Duke better than any one of the Calmersfield guests; he shares in our modes of thinking and feeling, and enjoys all our favourite pursuits. I am persuaded he prefers me to any of the girls here who are so vehemently intent on devouring him; and at all events I shall lose nothing by encouraging his attentions."

"Unless it be your own heart, which you seem to account but lightly throughout the affair."

"My heart!—oh! if I thought the Duke of Lisborough's

heart as secure as I *know* my own to be, I should become hopeless indeed! If he is selfish and mistrustful, what are *we?*—If he is forewarned and forearmed against a matrimonial ambuscade, *what* is Claudia Willingham?"

"*A woman!*—a name including a general confession of sensitive weakness. However, if not forearmed, dearest Claudia, you *are* at least *forewarned;* and once more believe me, that, did any chance of success exist for your views, Mamma would have been the very first to project and forward them; believe me, you have no hope of escaping the manœuvres of the Grayfield and her brother."

If anything could excuse the obstinate infatuation of Claudia Willingham, it was the conduct of the Duke himself. Among all his successive *engouemens*, none had ever appeared to possess him with half the intensity which now actuated his attention towards her. In their riding parties, he suffered no arm but his own to lift her to the saddle; in their evening dances he constantly claimed her hand, and would not hear of a change of partners. He insisted upon lingering by her side in the sculpture gallery, that he might point out his own favourite busts as subjects for her pencil; and he would no longer allow her to walk, drive, sing, or work, except in compliance with his own especial whims and fancies. True it was, that never did the lovely Claudia appear so beautiful, or so graceful, as when blushing under his gaze, or turning away from his animated whispers; for her whole heart—her whole being—was inspired with an ardour to please, such as she had never felt before.

Even Lady Maria found herself compelled, by the jealous comments of the various mammas assembled at Calmersfield, to turn her attention towards these mutual symptoms. But although gratified beyond measure, and not altogether without hope of a favourable result, she was discreet enough to abstain from personal interference. Apparently altogether occupied with her darling Eleanor, who was sufficiently obliging to be afflicted with a singularly well-timed cold, she contrived to shut herself up with her second daughter, wraps, lozenges, and arraroot, so as to remain in seeming ignorance of the general proceedings of Calmersfield, and the nervous irritation of Lord Robert Lorton.

But poor Lord Robert, in pursuance of his fatal birthright of younger brotherhood, had already undergone more than one matrimonial crisis of this trying description, and was growing an experienced tactician against the allied forces of his female adversaries. He had long since discovered that it was utterly useless to engage his light-headed, but true-hearted wife, in the affray, and that his sole reliance must rest upon the machinations of his "dear Charlotte." But even with her he had many difficulties to encounter. He

found it an arduous task to tame down her feminine susceptibilities into the moderation essential to political movements —into that calm politeness towards the offenders, which might alone enable him to meet their mischievous advances on an equal footing. In vain did he remind her that it was the fractious insolence of Madame Henriette towards the mistress of Louis XIV. which had procured her Duchy and distinction at court; in vain did he urge, that Lisborough, notoriously the most obstinate of men, once roused by any ungracious dealing towards his reigning princess to say "*I will*," would be thenceforward lost to them for ever!

"God knows it would be a most gratifying event for us both to see the dear Duke happily married; but then the daughter of such an *intrigante* as Lady Maria Willingham would at once mar the future happiness of our family circle. No, no—my dear Charlotte; Lisborough must select a kind, amiable, domestic being, such as his sister, or farewell to all comfort at Calmersfield."

"Whereas the Willinghams would fill the house, and engross all the Duke's attention with a set of riff-raff foreigners, of whom, in my opinion, we have more than enough as it is. Foreigners are very well in a sprinkling, to enliven a party with all their mopping, and mowing, and grimacing: but what have they to give in return for all the trouble we lavish upon them, even should we ever chance to visit their own beggarly castles of desolation?—Heaven grant *us* a sister-in-law, my dear Robert, who has been respectably educated in England, in the midst of respectable English connexions."

"To effect which most desirable consummation, let me implore you, Charlotte, to imitate my courtesy towards these Willinghams. I often prevent Lisborough from dancing with Miss Claudia by the assiduity with which I claim her hand myself—and she dare not refuse me. Now, it is *your* cue, dearest Lady G—, to affect a violent friendship for them all. Insist upon driving and walking, on all occasions, with Miss Willingham, and there is an end at once of those abominable, those dangerous *tête-à-têtes*; as to all the rest, leave it to my exertions, and I will engage to dislodge the whole tribe from Calmersfield without any permanent mischief."

Lord Robert Lorton's promised manœuvres on this occasion, although extremely efficient, were by no means either new or original: the ancient policy of the borrowed paw and the hot chesnuts, availed with him as well as with the cunning ape of the fable. To a "great house" like Calmersfield, a body-guard of toad-eaters forms an inevitable appanage; and the Duke of Lisborough was fortunate in somewhat more than the usual apportionment of *souffre-douleurs*, *doubles*, billiard-blocks, living-hunters—younger brothers to talk to the young lady-nieces, cousins, and guests—to fill up the

charades and cotillons, and improvisate epigrams for the ponderous albums of the Dowagers;—and middle-aged bores, with heads bald without, and pamphlet-stuffed within, to talk politics on public days to the country gentlemen; the said politics being importantly authenticated by incidental allusions to "my friend, the Home Secretary," or "my brother, the late President of the Board of Control." Among these, Lord Robert, as heir-presumptive to the lands and tenements around, was tolerably secure of finding ready instruments for his plans.

Polished into discernment by the whetting-stone of selfish jealousy, the wily brother was in possession of a correct tariff of the degrees of influence maintained by this respectable chorus of followers over the mind of the Duke; and he had no hesitation in selecting for the furtherance of his present purpose, Mr. Bentley, a young clerical dependent, whose lay waistcoats were apt to figure somewhat uncanonically in the hunting-field, and the evening quadrille; and a certain plausible, silver-tongued Pylades of a certain age, whose arm was always at the Duke's service to ascend the step towards White's, and whose white teeth formed a sort of visible echo to his Grace's wit, whenever he chanced to wax jacose. Mr. Russell was a remarkably well-bred man; never hazarded a request, and seldom spoke above his breath, or smiled beyond a given angle of satisfaction—a degree of moderation which insured him a distinguished place in the solemn friendship of the Duke of Lisborough! "Some people think Russell monotonous," his Grace was wont to say, "some call him a bore: but *I* like him; he never takes liberties."

On occasion of the Willingham conspiracy, however, the cautious Russell hazarded an attempt such as he had never periled on any previous temptation. Approaching the Duke in the pauses of a *battue*, and having, as he imagined, wrought him to a favourable mood of audience by a flourishing overture in honour of his Grace's favourite Nock, and its unparalleled feats of the morning, he ventured a slight skirmish against Lady Maria and her daughters. "They were lovely girls, certainly; but *maniérée*—decidedly *maniérée*. They had too much of the jargon of a particular *clique;* and that, perhaps, not of the highest order. For after all, the Neapolitan set was by no means of the most exclusive class."

"I am thoroughly tired of exclusives," replied the Duke, as he stalked away over the stubble. "There is nothing so wearisome as lending an eternal ear to the mere echoes of an echo. Give me a *new* oracle, even if its inspiration be of doubtful authenticity."

Half of this peevish reply being "by the gods dispersed in empty air," Mr. Russell did not immediately discover that he was voting with the minority.

"Did you ever happen to see the caricature," he persisted, "which Lancaster circulated at Paris, of Lady Maria Willingham in the character of *La vedova* something or other, out of one of Goldoni's comedies? with her daughters represented as——"

"I have *not* seen it yet. But Claudia was mentioning it to me last night, and promised to get it for me to complete my set of Lancaster's sketches—his domestic treacheries as *I* call them. I detest his system altogether, and I have determined that nothing shall induce me to re-admit him within my doors."

A tremendous dilation of the nostrils—an unfailing demonstration of Lisborough ire—now convinced Mr. Russell that he had missed his mark. Nay, so enormous a proportion of toads were administered by the Duke to his digestion, during the remainder of the day, that even *his* patient appetite turned restive. On the following morning, Mr. Russell's well-packed phaeton and well-furred valet drew up beneath the portico of Calmersfield; and he, to whom the remote prospect of contingent ejection from its hospitalities, in case of a Willingham Duchess, had been a sufficient motive for a first attempt at *tracasserie*, found himself compelled to an immediate cession of his bachelor-tenure. Lord Robert, meanwhile, who saw through the whole affair, beheld his departure without one struggle of remorse. He cared not whether the paw of the cat were reduced to cinders; saving as a horrible thermometer-evidence of the fury of the Lisborough furnace!

The clerical dandy was the next victim destined by the merciless Lord Robert to encounter the perils of the Willingham pitfall; and poor Bentley having been duly primed for mischief by Lady Grayfield's unceasing representations during two rainy mornings, of the poverty of Lady Maria's innumerable connexions, as well as of the large proportion thereof destined to wrestle with the ills of life in surplices and black coats, he rushed fearlessly to the ordeal. During the sleepless nights, or night-mared repose, following those days of atmospheric moisture, his mind's eye had rested upon the identical parochial church of the county of D. which he had long pre-appropriated as his own; while his mind's ear became deafened into horror, by the reading-in of a Willingham or a De Vesci. He became desperate; and like other desperate men, urged on the failure of his own fortunes.

Much has been said respecting the treasons hatched in female society during the solitary hour abandoned to their debates between dinner and coffee; but more, far more, might be added touching the reprisals practised by mankind, their natural enemy, in that fatal half-hour which succeeds the arrival of the groom of the chambers and his wax-lights. Scarcely has the last "good night" sounded in the last anti-

room—scarcely has the fair Viscountess, in her dressing-room, abandoned her perfumed locks to the delicate fingers of her French maid, and the worthy Viscount in the saloon beneath ensconced himself in a Skelmersdale chair, with a copy of the last Edinburgh Review in his hands—when every woman of the party, who chances to possess neither father, brother, husband, nor acknowledged lover, among the group of loungers retaining possession of the saloon, falls successively under the lash, and is finally sacrificed to the merciless scandal of their ill-nature.

"How very well the Miss Willinghams waltz," observed Mr. Ducie, a good-natured and gentlemanlike young Oxonian. "A cousin of theirs, a Christchurch man and old Etonian, who is a great friend of mine, told me they were considered the best dancers in Paris; and they at least excel anything one sees at Almack's."

"Yes! quite *figurantes*, as you observed," said Bentley, delighted with the cue. "Eleanor, failing a better vocation, would make an admirable Columbine, and Claudia——"

The Duke, who was drinking a glass of iced water, stopped short and investigated the hapless speaker from head to foot. "Well, Bentley, pray proceed. You are so admirable a judge of *les usages du grand monde*—so versed in *le manual des bienséances*—so exquisite a critic of female accomplishments—pray proceed. What of Miss Willingham and her waltzing?"

Bentley, who was out of sight of the dilated nostril, and not sufficiently acquainted with the vocal intonations of Lisborough fury to discover that the Duke was boiling with indignation, simply enough complied with the request.

"Why, as to Claudia Willingham and her waltzing, my lord, I must fairly avow that I should be very sorry to see a wife or sister of my own put forth the same attractions in a similar manner. '*Il y a des plaisirs si doux qu'ils nous sont défendus*,' said La Bruyère. Now I will just show you the lovely Claudia's notion of pleasure, and notion of decency." And seizing Sir William Vavasor, a remarkably shy young man, round the waist, he commenced an extravagant mimicry of Miss Willingham's style of dancing, perverted into a tone of voluptuous freedom, which the struggles of his reluctant and involuntary partner rendered still more ridiculous.

"Admirable!" exclaimed the Duke, his eyes flashing fire as he spoke, while he strove to attract the attention of the whole party to the scene. "My friend here is really *impayable!* Not satisfied with assuring you, gentlemen, that he would not accept Lady Maria Willingham's daughter as a Mrs. Bentley, in any shape—(poor girl! I trust no malicious person will petrify her by the intelligence!)—not satisfied

with reprobating a lady, one of my most esteemed Calmersfield guests, as vulgar and indiscreet, he literally presumes to adventure the chastisement of Archbishop, Bishop, and the diocese at large, by exhibiting in his own person all the indecent contortions of some degraded opera dancer. My good Bentley, I trust you may render your contrition available to the Dean and Chapter, at ——; but you will find it difficult to excuse yourself to *me* for insulting my female friends in my presence."

The Duke took a candle from the chiffonier, and stalked out of the room; a movement of dignity which was followed by the ominous silence of the rest of the party. Those who had been reading, looked up from their books contemptuously at the disconcerted Bentley—compassionately at the despairing Lord Robert. The young men shrugged their shoulders as they adjourned to the billiard-room; and the elder ones hastened up stairs, that they might gossip with their wives over the promised change in the politics of Calmersfield. Mr. Ducie alone had courage to observe aloud, "The Duke of Lisborough in love!—so much the better. A pretty and agreeable Duchess will be a great addition to the neighbourhood."

Meanwhile, having counselled the unhappy Bentley to pack up his portmanteau, and avoid the angry aspect of the morrow's breakfast-table, Lord Robert Lorton sought refuge from his woes in the sympathy of Lady Grayfield's dressing-room.

"It is all over, Charlotte! the thing is quite irremediable. Lisborough is evidently engaged to that artificial, hollow, odious girl. Poor little Robert!"

"Are you quite certain?"

"Oh! he has committed himself by so vehement a defence of his idol, that I have every reason to believe them engaged. I give up the case as hopeless."

"Retreat insures defeat. No, no! take nothing for granted—do not despair—fight on to the last gasp. Trust to me to second your efforts; and if we do not foil the Willinghams at last, why—'I will burn my crutch.'"

CHAPTER VIII.

J'ai fait en peu de tems d'assez belles conquêtes,
Je pourrois me vanter de fortunes honnêtes ;
Et nous sommes courus de plus de une beauté,
Qui pourrient de tout autre enfler la vanité.

VOLTAIRE.

It is astonishing with what velocity, according to the amiable modification of modern society, incidents and opinions are made to travel to the knowledge of persons, for whose ears, of all others, they were the least intended. Before noon on the following day, Lady Maria Willingham was perfectly acquainted with every domestic fact preceding the departure of Messrs. Russell and Bentley. But on this occasion the treachery of the clandestine informant was less flagrant than is commonly the case.

Lady Robert Lorton enjoyed too keenly the discomfiture of an interested manœuvre of any kind, to care whose character was compromised by its detection, or to wish to preserve the intelligence for her solitary amusement; and no sooner had her dispirited lord mounted his hack to ride to covert, than she sent for Eleanor to share her chocolate in her dressing-room; where, without exaggeration or reserve, she proceeded to detail the whole story. "But remember," added she, in conclusion, "remember my warning, and do not let Claudia order her *trousseau* on the strength of the Duke's passing enthusiasm—for *passing*, believe me, it really is. I have seen him in love and out of love six dozen times; his heart is worn so threadbare with the mean adulation of young ladies and their mammas, that he has learned to mistrust himself and them. He gives himself up to a momentary intoxication, only to re-assume a still more frigid sobriety; and were your sister, for whom last night he put lance in rest and was eager to engage in a crusade, to appear to-day at dinner in an ugly gown, or with her hair in ringlets, farewell to all Lisborough's sentiment. It would not cost him a tear were she to be impaled to-morrow at sunrise."

The fact and the comment were simultaneously communicated by Eleanor to her mother. But Lady Maria was either too much elated by the Duke's eager defence of her daughter, or was too habitually on her guard against deception, to look upon Lady Robert's qualifying notes on the tale, as anything more than an artful feint. Cunning people are apt to

see so much more than the truth, that they regard the actual visage as a mask, and expose themselves accordingly.

Nor did the events of the evening tend to diminish her fallacious self-congratulation. Lord Robert Lorton returned from the hunting-field with a visage lengthened like that of a prime minister who has divided on a minority; he was, in fact, at the lowest ebb of despair, touching the matrimonial tendencies of his brother.

The covert of an English *rendezvous de chasse* has been christened, not unaptly, "the Coffee-room;" there is scarcely a hunting county in which the forthcoming deaths and marriages, politics and scandal, are elsewhere manufactured. Now Lord Robert, who had unfortunately lingered in his Calmersfield dressing-room for the purpose of unfolding his budget of grievances to his lady, had arrived so late at the appointed spot, that the Russell and Bentley history had preceded his hack; and before he had time to reach his groom and sleek hunter, twenty different county voices had congratulated him upon the approaching nuptials of the Duke of Lisborough. Vainly did he attempt to escape—to turn a deaf ear to their insinuations—to interest himself with the huntsman and kennel politics: his friends readily perceived that he was agonized even unto martyrdom, and would not spare him a single sentence of their rapture!

Poor Lady Maria pondered all these things in her heart till she was well nigh demented! All dinner-time she fancied that the Duke would whisper his proposals in the course of a cotillon or a game of *écarté;* but she was disappointed. She then flattered herself that his Grace would demand a private audience when she retired for the night; and again she was disappointed! *N'importe!*—he had very significantly expressed his intention of breakfasting with them previous to their departure on the following morning: and as this was many hours before the *levée en masse* of the Calmersfield guests, there could be little doubt that he would seize on that auspicious moment for his declaration. But alas! just as the coffee and dry toast were smoking in his hand, in rushed Lady Robert in her *déshabille* of the night! declaring she would see the last of her dearest Eleanor, and placing herself with the greatest *naïveté* between Claudia and the Duke of Lisborough. Lady Maria could willingly have boiled her to death in the hissing coffee-pot!

The post-horses were punctual, and the Willinghams were compelled to avow themselves ready; yet not one word verging upon a proposal escaped the lips of his Grace. The travelling-carriage rolled with barbarous rapidity along the Macadamized roads of Calmersfield Park, and poor Claudia's bosom began to heave with suppressed sobs. At present, however, Lady Maria saw no cause for despair. Lady Ro-

bert's *mal-à-propos* arrival was accused as the origin of all the evil, and as a premeditated piece of mischief; and they might still look forward to the arrival of the post—that second providence which, like its prototype,

Sends letters to some wretch's aid!

On the strength of this forlorn hope, poor Claudia, who had travelled down bodkin, was ensconced in a comfortable corner of the carriage as a Duchess-expectant; and when they paused for the night, Lady Maria—the tactician—not only called her "her dearest child," but for the first time in her life was singularly curious touching the airing of her bed.

It must be owned that on their arrival at home, the lodging-house in Seymour-street wore a miserably lugubrious appearance, after the gilded saloons of Calmersfield; and that the "tough and scorched mutton" became at least as distasteful to their palates as after their first estrangement from the *cotelettes* and *salmis* of Paris. There is a vulgarity of sound and scent inseparable from a small house and small establishment, which her (future) Grace found at the present moment extremely repulsive to her nerves; and she began to listen with yet more feverish eagerness for the bi-sonorous matin knock, which excites so interesting a sensation in London among all persons correspondentially inclined. At length, after an interval of six or seven endless days, a frank from Calmersfield—"*Free*—Lisborough," was placed upon the breakfast-table: and, as it was addressed to Miss Willingham, Claudia, without a pause, and with a beating heart, tore open the envelope! A voluminous inclosure fell to the ground! Lady Maria grew pale and Eleanor red, with the intensity of their emotion; nor dared they hazard a single comment until Claudia, bursting into tears and tossing the epistle into her sister's lap, exclaimed, "Take it, Nelly!—'Tis only a bundle of embroidery patterns from that odious Lady Robert Lorton."

Lady Maria, unpossessed of a single spark of generosity of mind, instead of sympathizing with her daughter's disappointment, began to vent the expression of her own in a thousand bitter sarcasms; taxing the two girls with the failure of her favourite scheme, and straightway charging them with having formed it themselves, and on the most absurd premises. In a day or two, however, the Duke himself arrived in town, and all her expectations were revived by the sight of a card for the first ball at Lisborough House. From that moment nothing could be too good for Claudia; and growing suddenly discontented with all their Parisian finery, Lady Maria ventured on an order for three splendid new dresses to Triaud; an order which, by the by, before the day was over,

she contrived by various hints and suggestions to fasten as a present upon her poor old uncle, General De Vesci!

Meanwhile Mr. Russell had taken up his snug abode in his Albany Chambers for the season; and whereas, among the numerous dowager-houses and dinner-houses, where he was in a manner an habitual guest, and apparently as inevitable to the turbot as its lobster-sauce and cucumber—that of the Duke of Lisborough formed a highly important and agreeable addition, he felt himself deeply aggrieved by the premature abridgment of his holiday visit to Calmersfield, and cruelly menaced by the matrimonial projects of its noble proprietor.

Especially attached to the bachelor *état major* of his Grace, he had found it extremely convenient, on many occasions, to accept a corner of his carriage to Paris, and a *pied à terre* in his apartments in the Place Vendome; and at Baden and Spa he had more than once achieved the genuine honours of European vogue, by forming part of the Lisborough party. He was well aware that the distinguished favour with which he was received at the mansions of half the Lord A.s and B.s and C.s of the Peerage, on five days of the week, borrowed its cordiality from the certainty that he had formed part of the thrice hallowed circle of Lisborough House on the other two;—that his scandal was looked upon as an authentic echo, and his political intelligence as a dawning truth, because emanating from that fountain-head of fashionable glory. And to resign all this! to find himself degraded into a mere independent, respectable Mr. Russell, with two thousand a-year and a wig, was more than he could think upon with common patience. He was certain that Claudia did not like him;—that, being older than the Duke, she would regard him as likely to maintain his Grace in all his fidgety old-bachelor ways, and to vote for the exile of the loves and graces from their little circle. Already he imagined himself compelled to cede his place at table as an *habitué* of the house, to some young Hussar Viscount, flaunting with raven mustachios; already he saw himself dislodged from his long-tenanted suite at Calmersfield, in favour of some incipient Baronet-witling from Whites:—and as to Paris or Pisa, the future continental excursions of the Lisboroughs would of course be shared by the coroneted or landed interest—by young heirs affording the promise of a good match to the Duchess's younger sisters.

Unhappy Mr. Russell! after cogitating himself into a near approach towards a fit of the jaundice, he resolved, with most heroic energy, that the field should not be lost for lack of defence; so stepping into his phaeton, he contrived, in the course of thirteen morning visits, systematically selected among the most gossipping widows and maidens of his acquaintance, to spread a report of the Duke of Lisborough's

ensuing marriage with Claudia Willingham. He was a sufficiently experienced tactician to be aware that a premature alarm of this description, sounded in the ear of the public, is an almost peremptory bar against the consummation of the event.

On this occasion, indeed, the London public had nothing to say in reply. With all its schoolboy partiality for negation—all its terrier-like tendency to a snarl—it could find neither argument nor motive against the alliance. Lady Maria Willingham was forgotten in London society; her daughters were at present unknown; and as she had been careful to ascribe their arrival [" In Seymour-street from CALMERSFIELD PARK,"] among the locomotive and most mendacious records of the Morning Post, the world could form no reasonable conjecture against the probability of the case.

By the result of this little manœuvre, however, poor Lady Maria became thoroughly mystified in her turn. She found herself suddenly elevated to the highest honours of fashionable popularity; smothered by the sudden caresses of every human thing boasting the most distant consanguinity to the houses of De Vesci or Lorimer, and overwhelmed by successive showers of visiting and invitation cards from all the Duchesses, Marchionesses, Countesses, Viscountesses, and Baronesses, to whom she had ever been allied through the social link of a formal bow or curtsey. She was amazed to find how every body loved her, and how deep was the anxiety of all her former acquaintance to become introduced to her charming daughters.

"My dear Eleanor," she exclaimed, "how fortunate that I resolved to settle in London. We have not a single day disengaged for three weeks to come; and I see no chance of our being obliged to dine at home during the whole of the season. As to horses, Lady Dynevour insists upon my using hers, as if they were my own, and my uncle assures me, that at his club he is pestered to death by applications for an introduction here. By the way my dear girls, in all this success, you must not neglect your aunt, De Vesci; although she is never more than half awake, and might be easily persuaded that you have been sitting with her an hour every day since you came to town, yet your uncle is very acute about such matters, and very tenacious that every attention should be paid to Mrs. De Vesci."

"Yes! he hinted to me yesterday that we were grown very fine at Calmersfield; and that we had not dined in Portman-square since our return," said Claudia."

"Who *can* dine there?" exclaimed Eleanor; nothing but a salamander could be nourished without excruciation, upon that eternal series of mulligatawney, currie, cabobs, cayenne,

and preserved ginger. My uncle's bill of fare positively requires one's throat to be Macadamized."

"Oh, that might easily be remedied by anticipating with a *bouillon*."

"Yes, dear Mamma," said Claudia. "But the society—the odious set of men one meets there! What could neutralize the horrors of the De Vesci circle?"

"My dear, your uncle cannot get rid of his government-house ways. He cannot yet divest himself of the idea that he is the representative of majesty. He shakes hands with all his guests by way of being affable, and addresses all his morning visitors with, "I trust you will take your dinner here to-day.'—*Take your dinner!* How thoroughly colonial!"

"And fortunately these morning visitors of his are exclusively wretched denizens of the army and navy-list—atrocious monsters belonging to the Commissariat—or official *animalculi*; so that he has no chance of finding them pre-engaged. At seven o'clock the whole congregation of beasts throngs back to the De Vesci ark."

"Very true, my dear. But although the guests in Portman-square are persons whom it is your duty to cut if you meet them the next morning, remember, Eleanor, that your uncle has ten thousand a-year still unsettled, and has no relations nearer than ourselves. So go and put on your hat and inquire after Mrs. De Vesci."

For this time, however, they were redeemed from the impending calamity, by the arrival of Mary Willingham "on hospitable thoughts intent." Sir Joseph, having caught a remote whisper of Claudia's approaching advancement, had become suddenly impressed with the urgent necessity of inviting his sister-in-law and nieces to a family-dinner; and Sophia and himself were enduring the agonies of the annual influenza, inevitable in London to April and east winds, he had despatched his daughter with all the excuses and compliments he could muster between the pauses of ipecacuanha lozenges. Mary, however, proved an admirable ambassadress; for, instead of these formal civilities, she graced her errand with so earnest an expression of pleasure at seeing her cousins, and so inimitable a blush of cordiality, that no one could doubt her regret on finding them already bespoken. Lady Maria, indeed, howbeit she excused herself with courtesy was secretly indignant that she had been supposed to be at the command of an *impromptu* invitation. She felt that her day of "family dinners" was over; and that the tide of fashion now flowing in her favour, would land her high and dry among the vessels of far greater magnitude than a paltry provincial, ex-clerical, Sir Joseph and Lady Willingham.

"I am sorry to find Mr. Willingham has returned to Ox-

ford," observed Lady Maria to her niece. "It is so many years since I have seen him, that I am becoming very anxious to renew our acquaintance."

"Charles went with us to visit Minnie previous to his departure, and regretted to learn from her that the length of your stay at Calmersfield would deprive him of the pleasure of being presented to you for some time."

"By the way, Mary," observed Eleanor, "your brother's bosom friend was of the party, and one of its most agreeable members."

"Mr. Lorimer is very lively—has very great and varied talents," replied Mary Willingham, blushing still deeper than before.

"Lorimer!—Mr. Lorimer!—you must surely be speaking of one of our own cousins, while *I* was alluding to a Mr. Ducie."

"Mr. Ducie is only a schoolfellow of Charles's; Frederick Lorimer is his dearest and most intimate friend. I conceived that you must be aware of the fact, as I have always understood him to be nearly related to Lady Maria: he is Lord Lorimer's second son."

"Oh! we never plead guilty to a relationship to younger sons," replied Eleanor, laughing. "It does not answer to extend one's connexions below the heir apparent; otherwise we might incur the stigma of being seen with a Mr. John or a Mr. William for a partner, an infamy scarcely inferior to that of the '*Travaux Forcés*' of the branding iron."

Mary saw that her cousin intended to be witty, and rewarded the effort with an obliging smile; but she was utterly in the dark as to Eleanor's meaning. Lady Maria, who had been diligently inditing a flummering note of apology to Lady Willingham, now came forward with her inquiries.

"I think I heard you mention a son of my cousin Lord Lorimer's, Mary; what is he like, and what are his pretensions?—Is he a rising young man?"

"I scarcely know how to answer you," replied her niece, timidly. "Mr. Lorimer is remarkably handsome, and distinguished himself very much at Eton; but Lord Lorimer, who has an elder son in Parliament, and a younger one who is intended for the church, has decided that he cannot afford to give Frederick an university education, and Mr. Lorimer is sentenced to finish *his* at some College on the Continent."

"So much the better!—he will escape being stupified with the classics and mathematics, and all such unavailable learned lumber: and will acquire what Jouy calls '*les talens utils*'—music, dancing, languages, and fencing. I predict that this boy will become the most civilized of his family—who are *vieille-cour* people, and stupid enough. Eleanor! re-

mind me when I call on Lady Lorimer to inquire about this son Frederick of hers."

"At present," observed Mary, "Mr. Lorimer appears to have very little genius for '*les talens utils*;' he is almost as grave as my brother, who is almost as dull as myself," she continued, smiling, as she addressed her adieus to her cousins. "But I hope you will visit us more frequently, and assist in polishing and enlivening us both."

"Really that girl is not so frightful, after all," observed Claudia, who was arranging her own hair in a little mirror insinuated into the lid of her work-box.

"Not frightful, my dear!—she is marked with the small-pox."

"So slightly that is scarcely perceptible."

"And then," said Eleanor, "her teeth are so exquisitely beautiful, that her smile quite illuminates her countenance. I wonder if her brother is like her."

"He *was* the most miserable, meagre, yellow boy in nature," exclaimed Lady Maria peevishly. "I have never seen him since I lost my poor dear Claude!" (by no possible chance did she ever revert thus lamentingly to the death of her husband,) "and I hate the very thoughts of him. I always regard Charles Willingham as the usurper of my son's rights."

"You must marry him to Minnie," said Eleanor, "some six or seven years hence, and so restore Heddeston to the right line."

"Oh, my dear child," exclaimed the tenderest of mothers, "for the love of pity, do not remind me that I have a third daughter to renew my martyrdom of chaperonage; at all events, let me dispose of you both before I am obliged to form any plans on Minnie's account. When my little Claudia here becomes Duchess of Lisborough, she will assist in getting *you*, Eleanor, off my hands; and I shall depend upon you *both* to bring out Sir Joseph and Lady Willingham's *protégée* with fitting *éclat*."

"Here is Lady Monteagle come to drive us to Colville's, to order our bouquets for Monday night. Who intends to accompany the tiresome old woman?—Claudia?"

"Oh, no! my dear Eleanor, by no means: I cannot think of allowing Claudia to leave the house while this east wind continues; it is fatal to a fair complexion like hers—besides the Duke might call. And on second thoughts, Eleanor, I will go with you myself; for I must manage to coax the Dowager out of her carriage for Lisborough House. The hammereloth has not been put on mine yet; and one would not appear there you know in a horrible hired carriage."

"Oh, you might have left that piece of diplomacy in *my* hands. I can persuade old Monteagle to anything by listen-

ing to her opodeldoc stories, and her Jeremiades over young Stapylford's wildness."

"Well, good bye, my dear Claudia! Here is a book to amuse you while we are away—those French memoirs which the Comtesse Manfroni lent me at Calmersfield. But put them under the cushion of the sofa, if any one comes in: for I have found them *un pue—un pue—un pue!* And pray, my dear, do not sit too near the fire while you are reading; the glare of sea-coal is as bad for a delicate skin as the east wind. Monday night approaches, Claudia!—and in neglecting your personal attraction, you forfeit all chance to the Duke of Lisborough."

CHAPTER IX.

Combien d'esprit, de bonté de cœur, d'attachement, de services, et de complaisance dans les amis, pour faire en plusieurs années bien moins que ne fait quelquefois en un moment, un beau visage, ou une belle main!

LA BRUYERE.

I TRUST I have contrived to insinuate into the mind of the experienced reader—and what modern novelist is cursed with any other?—some suspicion of an existing attachment on the part of the gentle Mary Willingham towards Frederick Lorimer. The attachments of young ladies in general should never be more than *hinted* until sanctioned by banns or a special license; and Mary's was at present peculiarly entitled to this degree of delicate consideration; being unsolicited—uncertain of return—bestowed on a younger brother, the son of an avaricious and pompous sire—and presenting a tremendous promise of disappointment to the secret projects of her own parents.

The mere existence, indeed, of an unsolicited affection in the bosom of a female of delicacy, is a fact that would be carefully concealed by any other biographer; but for my own part, I feel no scruple in initiating the world into Mary's secret, being morally and demonstratively persuaded, that, from the palace to the cottage, there exists not throughout England a girl of purer feelings, or of more exquisite womanly modesty. Mr. Lorimer had been from childhood her beloved brother's beloved friend; had spent his holidays on more than one occasion at Heddeston Court! had grown up insensibly from the blue-jacketed schoolboy into the tall stripling of fashion; and no wakening consciousness, no recoil of feeling, had yet prompted her to withdraw from him the confidential ap-

pellation of Frederick; or to resent that of Mary from his own lips. She loved him;—but at present she knew it not herself.

Lord Lorimer was a formal, well-intentioned, mouthy, frothy man, of the old school. He had married late in life; and accordingly found himself called upon to direct and govern the wild animation of three fine young men, and two giddy young women, at a period of existence when elderly gentlemen are generally fonder of their night-gown and slippers than of the more active paths of society. Had not his Lordship entertained a singular degree of predilection for petty authority and minor legislation, he might have divested himself with ease of these uneasy cares of the parental estate; for Lady Lorimer was not only some thirty years his junior, but was equally distinguished by the solidity of her understanding and the excellence of her heart; she was a bright example of womanly virtue throughout the various duties and obligations of her sex. But she was neither addicted to moral harangues, nor prone to dwell with emphasis upon the minutiæ of social dialogue; and Lord Lorimer necessarily regarded her as deficient in acuteness and energy. He persuaded himself that had it not been for his own anxious interposition, his children would have been neither reared nor educated; and that, but for his exertions his whole household would have fallen into a most lamentable state of disorganization.

Mr. Lorimer, the heir apparent, unfortunately inheriting his mental and moral qualifications rather from his father than his mother, was somewhat empty and very solemn. He was vain of his birth, his person, and his acquirements; and fully intended to render them all available in the acquirements of still higher honours. Frederick Lorimer, on the contrary, was one of the most unassuming, cordial, frank-hearted beings in the world. Beyond the wish of being happy and rendering others so, he had not a single earthly desire; he was liable to strong and sudden impressions, but fortunately for his happiness, they were prompted by the same amiable and disinterested spirit which was the origin of his actions. He had all his mother's goodness of heart; but it was at present unregulated by the sterling common sense that formed the basis of Lady Lorimer's character. The daughters were good-humoured, lively girls; fond of finery and fashion—miserable at the loss of a ball, and enchanted by the adulation of every new partner. Their mother loved them with true maternal tenderness; and strove to moderate their girlish follies with so much judicious kindness, that she never terrified them into reserve or hypocrisy. Lady Lorimer was their most confidential friend; and being the first person admitted on all occasions behind the scenes of their wild plans and

vehement attachments, she was enabled to do far more by persuasion than their father by all his pompous authority.

To a woman of this amiable disposition, Mary Willingham's gentle character offered, of course, a far greater attraction than to her daughters; who were rapt into an ecstacy of admiration by the brilliant accomplishments of the more fashionable cousins, and never failed to vent their sarcasms upon the unattractive and ungraceful address of poor Mary. Vainly did Lady Lorimer attempt to equalize their prejudices and qualify their euthusiasm. She too, perhaps, was somewhat partial in her judgment; for with motherly penetration she had already discovered the timid girl's predilection in favour of her own Frederick. A mother is always indulgent towards the attachments created by her offspring; and more particularly towards a disinterested passion for her second son. Now, among the persons who were the most vehement in their sympathy with the reported engagement between Claudia Willingham and the Duke of Lisborough, the Lorimer family in general particularly distinguished themselves. His Lordship, who was the cousin of Lady Maria, and a prodigious stickler for the maintenance of a family connexion, was highly gratified by the prospect of such a splendid collateral addition to his family tree. Mr. Lorimer, whose mind was bewildered by borough-interest and laudable Parliamentary ambition, already projected nothing less than a junction with the Lisborough party; and the girls out-ecstasied their usual animation, in their triumphant anticipation of bridal balls and unnumbered partners at Lisborough House. Even Lady Lorimer rejoiced. She knew it was the first wish of Lady Maria's worldly heart to form an advantageous establishment for her daughters; and she was always satisfied that other people should be made happy in their own way. Frederick alone remained indifferent on the occasion; he had never yet seen his friend Charles's beautiful cousins; and a *mariage de convenance* was an occurrence claiming no sympathy from his honest bosom. He was destined, however, to alter his opinion on the subject.

It chanced that by some strange miscalculation or oversight on the part of the Miss Lorimers, Lady Lorimer's cards for an assembly had pointed out the express evening selected for the first ball at Lisborough House. His Grace, pre-assured of the most fashionable crowd in London, or to speak more correctly, finding the whole of London society open to his fastidious selection, was always late in his invitations; so that there remained no time for the circulation of a postponement on Lady Lorimer's part. His Lordship, her husband, indeed, was indignant at the bare suggestion of such an humiliation. "He flattered himself," he said, "that Lady Lorimer was secure of forming her own distinguished circle,

let however many Dukes appoint their entertainments for the same evening." He even insinuated a hope that his Grace of Lisborough might not find cause to lament *his own* temerity. His daughters began to find their secret consolation in anticipating the accession of brilliancy which the simultaneous ball would confer upon the toilets of their female guests; and Frederick needed no consolation. He had privately determined to slip away "*unknownst*" in the thickest and dullest of his mother's uneventful party, and to be the first to join in the first waltz of the rival festival.

The important night arrived. The candles and sinumbras blazed, the liveries glittered, and the street resounded with oaths and flagellation. A crash of panels, and an unintermitting plunge of irritated steeds, deafened the neighbourhood. In the midst of this noisy overture, Lady Maria and her daughters ascended Lord Lorimer's illuminated staircase, unprepared for the sensation excited by the annunciatory reiteration of their name throughout the moving mass of white satin and diamonds in the crowded suite above. They had very little suspicion of the vehemence with which a thousand disappointed rivals thronged towards the reception-door, to catch the earliest glimpse of the favoured beauty who was about to monopolize the most coveted of British coronets. Lady Maria, indeed, became agreeably conscious of an universal buzz of admiration following their entrance; but this she very naturally attributed to the loveliness of the two *débutantes*, on whose adornment neither labour nor expense had been spared. She discovered with delight that the result was eminently successful; Claudia and Eleanor Willingham were, beyond comparison, the most beautiful girls in the room.

Scarcely had they struggled through the outskirts of the crowd, when ten, twenty, thirty different persons were pleading to Lady Lorimer for an introduction; and among those to whom a Continental acquaintance, or an intimacy of "auld lang syne," afforded any plea for familiarity, Lady Maria was quite amazed to find what a very strong anxiety existed to learn how she bore the change of climate—how she liked her new house—how she ate, drank, slept, moved, thought and felt. Not Shakpeare's Crook-back, after his successful suit to the Lady Anne, could be more smitten with astonishment at the discovery of his own unsuspected attractions. Dinner parties!—she might have dined for five hundred days to come at the expense of the Peerage in general. Horses and carriages!—she might have travelled on borrowed wheels to the Cataracts of Upper Egypt, without the expenditure of a single feed of corn. She heard honourable mention made of a long-forgotten bilious fever which had nearly exterminated her in her teens; and it was astonishing what a number of

intimate friends now reminded her of their former visits to the obsolete dampery of Chiswick;—"visits she had probably never heard of, as it appeared a mere matter of ceremony to leave a card."

Lady Maria was wise enough to take things as she found them, without instituting an inquiry into motives and contingencies. It was premature to affect the dignity of offended majesty; and it would be quite time enough to profit by the lavish offers of her profuse congregation of friends, in case of the failure of her mighty matrimonial expectations. She was all courtesy, all bland and smiling gratitude; "to beguile the time," she looked like the time; and was as affably dignified as though she was mother to all the Duchesses of the whole coronation-pageant.

There was one person, at least, in that brilliant assemblage, who was as disinterested in her admiration of Claudia's loveliness, as she was painfully affected by that bestowed from another quarter upon Eleanor's animated graces; and this was the modest daughter of Sir Joseph Willingham.

"I am dying to get near you, Mary!" exclaimed Frederick Lorimer, addressing her over the capacious shoulder of a stationary Dowager. "I want you to tell me the name of the beautiful creature who kissed her hand to you just now—there! —she is smiling at you still."

"The young lady with the white flowers in her hair?"

"Young lady? vile, frigid distinction! No, no!—the goddess—nymph—fairy queen—what you will—anything but young lady!"

"It is my cousin, Eleanor Willingham."

"Lucky dog that I am, for she is mine also! I will fly to claim my relationship. Or stay, Mary; you who stand in an intermediate degree of consanguinity to both, *you* shall be my mistress of the ceremonies."

"Willingly, if you will lend me your arm to get through the crowd. Mamma is in the midst of a rubber, and I must ask her permission before I leave her side."

But before she could obtain the sanction of the deliberate Lady Willingham, Frederick was gone again. His impatience had carried him towards one of his own sisters, whose services he knew he could command; and Mary, wedged in between the rubber and the Dowager, had to endure the gradual torture of observing his animated advance towards Lady Maria's party; his presentation and flattering reception; his flushed cheek in addressing Eleanor, and her smiling elegance in listening to his irrepressible adulation. By and by, while still immovably clutched in the gripe of the crowd, she saw him present his arm to lead the blushing beauty into the refreshment room; and as they vanished from her view, the chamber in which she stood became an undistinguishable chaos of

glimmering lights and rocking walls; and the conversation around her was generalized into a hollow murmur, like the voice of a chafing sea. During her progressive recovery from this first shock of incipient jealousy, a country-neighbour, a Kentish Baronet, who had long loved her for the patience with which he endured his profuse gift of tediousness, pressed his services on her acceptance for a similar journey; an offer which Mary in the restless hope of witnessing the conclusion of the affair, readily accepted. Their progress through the crowded rooms, however, was slow. The provincial Baronet was no adept in the polite art of inserting his elbows into the shrinking sides of the stationary matrons; and poor Miss Willingham was much too gentle and too courteous to rush forward through the opposing tides with the insolent defiance of a girl of many seasons.

As she passed through the door at which stood Lady Lorimer, a patient sentinel keeping watch and ward over the interests of her arriving and retreating guests, her pale face attracted the attention of the kind hostess.

"My dear Mary! you are indisposed—exhausted by the heat! Can I get you anything! or shall I let Lady Willingham know that you are unwell?"

"Thank you, dear Madam, I have just quitted Mamma. Sir William Wyndham is so good as to take me in search of a glass of cold water; and when I have left this crowded room, I shall be well in a moment."

"Go then, my love! I will not detain you," whispered Lady Lorimer, kindly accompanying her to the head of the stairs, and remaining there a moment to watch her progress. She *had* however detained her: and just as Mary reached the hall, she experienced the peculiar satisfaction of seeing Frederick Lorimer, hat and cane in hand, escort the well cloaked figure of Eleanor through a file of footmen towards the street —Lady Maria and Claudia having already preceded them to the carriage. Apparently there already existed an excellent understanding between the parties; for having deposited Eleanor, he jumped in afterwards!—The footman, in slamming both steps and door shouted "Lisborough House!" and away they drove in a moment. "After all, Frederick is their cousin!" thought Mary. But the recollection, and the scene, and the relationship altogether, renewed her dizziness, and her urgent inclination for a glass of cold water!

It was the first time poor Mary had ever grieved over her own and her parents' deficiency of *ton*—it was the first time she had ever envied an admission into the enchanted halls of the Duke of Lisborough—it was the first time she had ever become painfully conscious of her own personal inferiority to her favoured cousins! They were sprung from the same parent-stock: in fortunes her destiny rose far above their own;

her education and acquirements equalled theirs; her heart and mind raised her immeasurably above their level. Her attire on the present occasion had been richly selected; nor could any reasonable or tangible superiority be alleged in their favour. Yet Mary felt at once that *she* had no business with the ball at Lisborough House; that she had no air of fashion; no currency in the *beau monde* to sanction her admittance; no style to adorn the Galoppe or the Mazurka; no *tournure*, no brilliancy of beauty to fascinate the attention of the mercurial Frederick Lorimer.—It was a hopeless case!—and Mary was obliged to have recourse to a second glass of water, before she could nerve her courage to re-encounter the affectionate inquiries of his unsuspecting mother, or to plant herself once more beside the critical interest of the concluding rubber.

But if Mary's emotions were painfully excited by the events of the evening, what was the tremour of Lady Maria's frame, on joining the long line of carriages which heralded their approach to the purlieus of the ducal mansion; There is nothing more perplexing both to body and mind than the rocking and jerking motion which accompanies a fashionable progress of this description, and mocks the impatience of the feverish denizens of the crowded carriages. Eleanor, who sympathized feelingly in the agitation of her sister, silently pressed the trembling Claudia's hand; but their mother was too much elated by recent homage, and by the confirmation she had received at Lady Lorimer's of the general belief in his Grace's attachment to her daughter, to dream of anything but an approaching triumph, and Claudia's glorious distinction as queen of the ball. She was persuaded that before they left Lisborough Hall that night the proposal would be made, and the strawberry-leaves already budding over the brow of the future Duchess.

The gateway was happily navigated, and the circle of the court-yard achieved, amid the unnoticed compliments and witticism of Mr. Lorimer. The marble hall, the vestibule, the laurel wreathed stair-case, the perfumed antichamber were quickly passed; and already at the door of a gallery leading to the blazing ball-room, they caught a glimpse of their noble host. Claudia, who was leaning on her sister's arm, trembled as she pressed it to her side: she was almost breathless; for being intimately versed in his Grace's habits and demeanour, she discerned in a moment that he had assumed his grandest aspect of dignity to do the honours of his house.

"The mechanical groom of the chambers now whisperingly announced the names of "Lady Maria and the Miss Willinghams—Mr. Frederick Lorimer;" but his Grace did not advance the breadth of one flower of the Tournay carpet. He gently extended the tip of his hand, gracefully inclined his head, and suffered his lips to express a courteous but listless

smile of general welcome. A fresh whisper was breathed in his ear—new guests were arriving, and the Willinghams passed on without further notice.

Eleanor, perceiving thar her sister was dreadfully pale, contrived to lead her behind the crowd of the ball-room, and place her on a seat; while Lady Maria, on Mr. Lorimer's arm, proceeded into the midst of the fray, to conceal her mortification in affected volubility; to fan herself, exclaiming against the heat of the room; and to look anxiously around her for some of her Neapolitan or Calmersfield acquaintance.

But it would not do! Mr. Russell stood bowing and displaying to her, from an awful distance, the double range of his pearly teeth; the reinstated Mr. Bentley, who was flirting to desperation with a highly rouged foreigner, remarkable from her very bare shoulders, gave her the recognition of a familiar nod as she passed; and half a dozen Ladyships interrupted their gossipry to lisp, "My dear Lady Maria, how long have you been in town?—what an insufferable crowd!" but no anxiety—no homage—no eager inquiries—no allusion to her charming daughters:—they evidently cared for her as little as if Claudia were already married to a stock-broker, and settled in Bedford-square.

Frederick Lorimer meanwhile, who was utterly unsuspicious of her Ladyship's schemes, and their frustration, and who was tolerably unversed in the conventional value of a Duke in Dowager estimation, calculating his Grace of Lisborough's importance rather according to his *battues* and stud of hunters, than to his family diamonds and hereditary precedence, became extremely anxious to get rid of his loquacious companion, in order that he might obtain Eleanor's hand for the first quadrille, preparations for which were now audible from the orchestra. After sundry manœuvres, he managed to settle Lady Maria into an arm chair, and an unavoidable prose with the De Vesci wife of an Irish Archbishop; and instantly flew in search of her daughters.

Claudia and Eleanor were now seated in view of the whole room, on either side of Lady Robert Lorton, who was striving to entertain them with her most graceful and affectionate attentions. Although unsuspicious of the full extent of Lady Maria Willingham's presumptuous expectations, she felt convinced that her young friends must have been mortified by the manner of their reception. She had a personal partiality for both, and was, moreover, of too generous a spirit to bear with patience that *any one's* feelings should be sacrificed to a family manœuvre. But while Frederick was forming his engagements with Eleanor, who declined dancing so early in the evening, Lady Grayfield herself came up to the little group with the utmost cordiality; and relaxing from her usual habits of dignity, insisted that Clau-

din should take her arm, and parade the whole suite of state apartments, to which they were now introduced for the first time. Her sister remained with Lady Robert and her new admirer; and as she noticed the affectionate patronage with which Lady Grayfield ushered Claudia through the throng, introducing her to this person and that, and pointing out to her attention the principal objects of *virtù* adorning the saloon, she became satisfied that her Ladyship had dismissed all jealous apprehensions from her mind. She saw, in a moment, that Claudia's chance of Duchesship was over.

In a very few minutes the whole mystery was explained. The burst of Michau's well-accorded band resounded from the gallery, and in a moment the Duke of Lisborough was seen leading the waltz with a very fair, young, timid, simple-looking girl—decidedly English in her air and attire—totally devoid of pretension, and with symptoms of the nursery still clinging to her personal appearance. She danced ill, and appeared embarrassed by the publicity of her situation; yet, when they paused, the Duke "hung over her enamoured"—whispered in her ear—and treated her with all those tender distinctions which he had recently bestowed upon Claudia Willingham. The thing was evident enough. She was his last *engouement!*

"Who is that very interesting girl?" inquired Eleanor, assuming an air of candour, and somewhat ungraciously interrupting Lady Robert in her details of a fall from her horse, which she had either *had*, or expected to have, or been apprehensive of having, in the park that morning.

"Which interesting girl?—I am looking upon a legion of angels in blonde and white satin."

"With whom the Duke of Lisborough is dancing?"

"Let me see—let me see; who has he selected for his partner?" said Lady Robert, lifting her glass to her listless eye, and advancing her graceful head through an interstice of the crowd; "Oh, that is Lady Anastasia Burgoyne, a niece of the late Lord Grayfield's. Extremes meet, you know, my dear Eleanor: by which rule Lisborough—having been in love last week with your sister, and her tact, and elegance, and accomplishments—is just now desperately captivated by yonder little ladyship's girlish *niaiserie* which *he* chooses to call *naïveté*. He talks about her uncontaminated mind and beautiful simplicity, and the charm of being a first object of attachment to such a spotless heart!"

"And what says our friend, Lady Grayfield, to all this?" inquired Eleanor, after having ascertained by a furtive glance, that her new adorer had been tempted from her side by the excitement of the music, and the scene, and the circling waltz.

"Why, I rather suspect that Charlotte cunningly let slip

this new quagly in his path, purposely to give a novel impulsion to his feelings."

"She would, then, approve his union with Lady Anastasia?"

"She would approve his union with no one: she chooses herself to play Queen Margaret to his Francis the First. No, no! Lady Anastasia is notoriously engaged to her young cousin, Lord Vallerhurst, or she would not be permitted to whisper unmolested in Lisborough's ear, as she is doing at this very moment."

"*Engaged!*" thought Eleanor; "then, after all, there may yet remain some hope for poor Claudia."

"Last night," resumed Lady Robert Lorton, "at a little impromptu ball at the Ducie's, Charlotte was congratulating me that the Duke had formed so safe an attachment; which would preserve him, she said, from other perils. I am pretty sure she alluded to your sister; but I affected not to understand her; affronting her and the Burgoynes, who are nearly akin to her late husband, I assured her there was a report at the clubs that Lord Burgoyne had sent over a commission to Torlonia, the banker at Rome—where Lord Vallerhurst is completing his education—to hire bravos, and waylay him in the Campagna."

"And stiletto him in due process?"

"In order that the old betrothment might not interfere with his silly little daughter's present views of becoming Duchess of Lisborough."

"At which insinuation Lady Grayfield laughed, of course?"

"By no means; she looked extremely serious for half an hour: and at length only comforted herself with the reflection that she should be able to manage her own step-niece, Anastasia, far better than a Claudia Willingham. Poor Charlotte! she is pursued by the furies like Orestes—perpetually haunted by the phantom of dear Lisborough's marriage! And now tell me who was that tall, dark-eyed admirer of yours to whom you were so barbarous just now?"

"A second son of Lord Lorimer's. And even with *your* romantic enthusiasm, dearest Lady Robert, I trust you will sanction any degree of barbarity I may put in force against a paltry younger brother."

"Certainly, love! certainly! unless he chance to have a sister as vigilant as Charlotte Grayfield, who will take care that the head of the family never anchors, or wrecks himself upon the sunken rock of matrimony."

Mr. Russell, perceiving that the Willingham dynasty was not yet wholly degraded, and that Eleanor appeared to be very high in the graces of the exclusive yet popular Lady Robert Lorton, now approached to tender his tardy compliments of inquiry; to utter his sentimental reminiscences touching the musical *soirées* of Calmersfield, and his anticipa-

tions of archery meetings there for the ensuing summer. Even the Duke of Lisborough proved himself to be sensible of the influence of general admiration, by following the outstretched finger of the crowd. Claudia Willingham's loveliness, even with the drawback of an unusual air of languor and vexation, had excited the strongest interest, as she passed through the rooms on Lady Grayfield's arm; and no sooner had he found all the young lordlings of the day crowding around him to solicit the honour of a presentation to the new beauty, and discovered, by fatal experience, that Lady Anastasia waltzed detestably, and conversed with more ingenuousness than ingenuity, than he condescended to claim the honour of Miss Willingham's hand.

He addressed her, however, neither as a bridegroom nor a lover, but "talked of opera, park, and play" after the most approved fashion of partnership common-place; and by this conduct, poor Claudia was more hurt and more mortified than if he had withdrawn his notice altogether. She might, in that case, have believed him to be offended;—as it was, she could only recognize him as indifferent, or insultingly capricious.

CHAPTER X.

Her love—like violets breathing 'neath a thorn—
Seems but the sweeter for companionship
With aught so dark—so harsh—so cruel! Love
Which, like Eastern gums by pilgrims offered
Upon a holy shrine, yields its soft odours
With an expiring breath.

MARLOW.

Mary Willingham, who had already entered her twentieth year, had nevertheless remained guiltless up to that fatal sixth of May, of all the ordinary manœuvres of young ladies of her age; and unmolested by the sweet sensibilities which render the pillow sleepless, and the common business of life importunate. On returning from Lady Lorimer's party, however, she had somewhat prematurely dismissed her maid—whose care in disposing the satin folds within the wardrobe and the necklace in the trinket-box, had never before appeared so superfluous—in order that she might moisten her *papillotes* with a few tears; while the officious attendant, who had already ascertained from the footman the care with which Sir William Wyndham had handed her young lady to the carriage, and who, with waiting-maid sagacity had immediately

discovered her discomposure, retreated to her own aërial dormitory, under the satisfactory conviction that Miss Willingham had returned home with a proposal still echoing in her ears.

Meanwhile, poor Mary wept, even while she blushed at her own tears. She accused herself of a very indecorous weakness in this irrepressible emotion; she reviled herself as mean, envious, and contemptible; and after forming a praiseworthy resolution, to think no more of Frederick Lorimer, and to cherish no unkind feeling against her cousin Eleanor, she retired to rest, and dreamt of him till morning; when she awoke in the hysteric agony of tearing the white wreath from her rival's snowy brows!

Unfortunately, she had to encounter a stormy breakfast-table. Lady Willingham was fretting under the reminiscent afflictions of two lost rubbers of the night before; and Sir Joseph, who had been perusing two descriptive columns in the Morning Post, illustrating the Duke of Lisborough's ball, and enumerating his partners, could scarcely smother his vexation that "the fascinating and lovely Miss Willingham," who had such an honourable mention in the recital, was not a daughter of his own. He could not forgive Lady Maria, with her paltry twelve hundred a-year—and, moreover, as his own pensioner to a still meaner amount—for having achieved a distinction unpurchaseable by his annual thousands!

Mary perceived their peevishness in a moment; but it only urged her to a double effort in conquering her own secret despondency. She possessed that exquisite art—but no! it was not an *art*—nothing in Mary was an art—that exquisite impulse of nature, which teaches the suggestion of every image and every association most capable of affording pleasure to an auditor. She pointed out to her mother's notice the beautiful flowers—the firstlings of summer, which had been forwarded that morning from the Heddeston conservatory; she asked her father's permission to share his afternoon ride, and proposed a visit to Minnie, as an object for their expedition; and she spoke with such gentle submissiveness, and endured with such silent forbearance their fractious negatives, that Sir Joseph and his Lady rose from their third cup of tea, with brows less ruffled, and with hearts less biliously sensitive to the minor woes of life. A thorn still rankled, indeed, in poor Mary's bosom; but she was little accustomed to indulge in pondering over her own personal grievances.

"Here is that tiresome old Lady Monteagle," exclaimed Lady Willingham, as she left the breakfast table. "If Dowagers *will* take early airings, at least they might refrain from premature morning-visits. Mary, my dear, come with me into the drawing-room: I cannot deny myself, for I am sure she caught a glimpse of my cap."

"I dare say Lady Monteagle saw my cousin's name among the guests at Lisborough House; and fancying it to be mine, is come to inquire if Stapylford were there."

"Stapylford! You are dreaming;—Mr. Stapylford is at Oxford."

"Nominally, dear Mamma. But Charles writes me word he retains his rooms at Mivart's and runs up to town for all the best *fêtes* and fashionable races. His mother is now confined at home by Lord Stapylford's illness; and I am persuaded she often commissions Lady Monteagle to cross-examine me concerning her son, whose proceedings she imagines we must learn from my brother."

"And bad as those proceedings are, she has nobody but herself to thank for his irregularities. Stapylford has a good disposition, and had he been brought up as Charles has been, might have turned out an honour to his family."

On reaching the drawing-room, they found that the Dowager was not unaccompanied. Lady Maria was with her, and began expressing to Mary her extreme regret that her daughters had found themselves too much fatigued by their ball, to leave home so early; her own principal motive, indeed, for such an untimely visit had been to inquire after her niece, whom she announced to have been looking very pale and ill the night before.

Lady Willingham, rather startled by this intelligence, fixed her eyes upon her daughter's face; which was now died of so deep a crimson that she abandoned her momentary intention of sending for Sir Henry Halford. Lady Maria's ostensible motive of politeness being thus fairly disposed of, she proceeded, under its screen, to the real business of her singular pre-animation; to discover, namely—whether Lady Willingham purposed attending the drawing-room; a measure, which, when she found it had been previously determined, she very strongly recommended. The fact however was, that she had long intended to present her daughters, and had fully intended to borrow Sir Joseph's equipage for the occasion. She was secure of the loan of Lady Monteagle's or Mrs. De Vesci's; but she had persuaded herself that the *family* carriage, bearing the Willingham liveries and arms, would appear more exclusively her own.

But she had still another latent intention and as soon as the Dowager had engaged Lady Willingham's attention with one of her running-pattern monologues upon the costume, equipages, entertainments, habits, and customs of the last century—upon Ranelagh, Garrick, Delpini, Sir Joshua, and the riots of eighty—Lady Maria affected to be fascinated by the beauty and variety of Mary's collection of heaths; and drawing her to the marble table on which they stood, began to require all sorts of botanical explanations.

"And this lovely plant, you say, is the *Erica Latifolia?*—and this the *Gracilis?* My girls were quite vexed, Mary, that they could not procure half an hour's gossip with you; but they are nursing themselves for to-night—Lady Robert Lorton chaperones them both to the opera. Pray let me attempt to decypher the tiny label upon this beautiful plant—'the *Erica Si-n-en-sis.*' Young Lorimer, I find, is an intimate friend and school-fellow of your brother's? (And you tell me these heaths should only be watered twice or thrice a week?) Pray is he Lord Lorimer's second or third son?—and what sort of a young man is the eldest?"

"Frederick is a second son; and Mr. Lorimer is expected to become a very distinguished man, as I believe I mentioned to you before; he took a brilliant degree, and came into Parliament this very session. Independently of his rank and fortune, he will probably make a great figure in public life."

"I am glad to hear of it; for they are near connexions of my own, and a family which I highly respect. Lady Lorimer appears to be a mere good sort of woman; and her husband one of those stately machines of courtly wood, made to do honour to a star and garter. My dear Mary, your conservatory at Heddeston must be considerably increased to display these lovely exotics. But, in fact, it requires the eye of the master, or rather, the eye of the mistress, to produce anything creditable in the way of flowers; and in my time, we never had a gardener of sufficient science to engage *my* attention in the business. Frederick Lorimer has, of course, no *expectations* beyond his father's interests, and a younger brother's portion?"

"Not that I am aware of."

"There is very often a maternal grandfather, or a bachelor uncle, or an old maiden godmother, who takes pity on those wretched martyrs of the creation; but in that case a double surname generally forewarns one. I thought it augured ill when I heard this young man presented as only Mr. *Frederick* Lorimer. Had *I* been blest, or oppressed, with such a supernumerary appendage as a second son, I certainly would have had him christened Mr. Howard Willingham, or Mr. De Vesci Willingham, by way of helping him through his undeserved misfortunes. It is inflicting an unnecessary degree of infamy upon a poor young man to call him Mr. John, or Mr. Thomas."

Her Ladyship again adverted to the stand of heaths, as she made her way back to the scene of dialogue between the Dowager and the dummy; and Mary was so utterly unprepared to suspect the existence of artifice, or to imagine the necessity of manœuvring where no field of action courted conquest, that she actually fancied her aunt had been smitten with

a genuine admiration of her plants; and immediately proceeded to dismember them of their choicest flowers in order to form a *bouquet* for her cousins' appearance at the Opera.

"What an absurd thing," exclaimed Lady Maria to Lady Monteagle, as they drove back to Seymour-street, settling the fragrant nosegay in the pocket of the carriage as she spoke; "what a very unnecessary exertion on the part of Lady Willingham to go to the drawing-room! With an ugly and unfashionized daughter, obscure connexions, and bad health, I think she might spare herself the attempt; which, after all, will gain her nothing. She has not the least chance of being included in any royal invitation; nor has she any family relationship to keep up, or to maintain her own dignity."

"The Willingham's are a very ancient Kentish family," replied Lady Monteagle, who, being herself a Baronet's daughter, rebelled against the suggestion; "and belong to a class which has always been found a main support to the Sovereign and the Constitution. Charles—my grandson Stapylford's friend—will probably, one day, represent the county."

"Possibly! but they are not going to present *him* at the drawing-room. And as to poor Mary, she is quite a Bodham in countenance and gesture. I should recommend her to marry some clergyman with a good living, within distance of Heddeston; for she will never make a creditable match. She is totally unfit for London society."

"Our neighbour, Sir William Wyndham, has proposed for her twice; and *he* has twenty thousand a-year, and the reversion of a peerage."

"Indeed! and she had the impudence to refuse such an offer! I remember Wyndham Park; I have a very great respect for the family; the present Baronet was a charming boy, but I have quite lost sight of him. You must make us acquainted, my dear Lady Monteagle; old neighbours you know should never cease to be friends. The first time we dine in Hereford-street, pray oblige me by persuading Lady Dynevour to invite Sir William Wyndham."

"He has dined with us twice this year, and we never exceed a given number of invitations to the Whig interest. It might look odd in the county, you know; and make people talk. And now, my dear Lady Maria—pray tell me—you were at Lisborough House last night, and of course saw Stapylford?"

"I do not know Mr. Stapylford, by sight."

"My dear Ma'am, he is the constant companion of your nephew."

"I should not know my nephew, were I to meet him in any place of public amusement. Your Ladyship forgets how long I have been abroad, and how much young men alter."

"Well—had you chanced to see Montague Stapylford, I think you could not have failed to ask his name. He is certainly the finest young man in town, and the most fascinating; and if he is not ruined, or shot in a duel before he comes of age, I venture to predict that he will turn half the heads in London. It is a grievous thing—a very grievous thing, my dear Lady Maria!—that young man, you know, is heir to an ancient peerage and a clear thirty thousand a-year; but he is already in the hands of the Jews; and if his father should die, there can be little doubt that he would be ruined in a month; ay, and break his poor mother's heart into the bargain."

"My dear Lady Monteagle! You see things too much on the dark side! Pray how old is Mr. Stapylford?"

"Just eighteen; but he has been as good or rather as *bad* as his own master, these two years past—has already exposed himself in a thousand ways;—indeed I must say, that had it not been for Charles Willingham, he would have been already expelled both Eton and Oxford."

"Very much to my nephew's credit."

Oh! if Charles were not *rather* too much of a saint, and dreadfully ugly, he would be a charming young man. Stapylford has lived so much with me, that they have been brought up together more like neighbour's children than anything else; but the fact of the matter and the true secret is, that young Willingham has nothing to *gain* by my grandson—wants nothing from Stapylford, you know, my dear Lady Maria: whereas the young men with whom he chiefly associates are considerably older than himself, and look upon him as a sort of natural prey. They negociate for him with the Jews, because they are aware they shall profit by the produce of the loan;—they arrange the purchase of his horses, because they know they shall ride them;—and urge him to give dinners at the Clarendon, with an eye to the reduction of their own coffee-house bills. Now there is young Tichborne, the Duke of Arlington's nephew, who, to my knowledge, has only an allowance of a hundred and fifty pounds a-year; upon which he keeps five hunters, and indulges in a thousand expensive vices. He is just so much older than Stapylford, and so much favoured in society, as to form his model; and, by way of gratitude, I suppose, Montague defrays the cost of *his* follies as well as his own."

"Well—well! my dear Lady Monteagle," replied Lady Maria with an air of vague abstraction, for she could interest herself in none but her personal distresses; "all that sort of thing will work its own cure. His father, you know, was very wild till he married Miss Margaret."

"*Till* he married? Ah! my dear Madam, few people

know what my daughter Margaret has had to go through! She has been a victim to Lord Stapylford's dissipation."

Lady Maria, who had known her for fifteen years as the most fashionable flirt and determined ball-giver in London, tried to look credulous and sympathizing.

"A husband on the turf, and half a dozen executions in the house, form a considerable bar to domestic happiness!"

"Half a dozen executions! why, then, Mr. Stapylford—between his own extravagance and his father's—will come into a very limited inheritance!" exclaimed Lady Maria, in whose mind a remote plan had already begun to form itself on the young Oxonian's account.

"Pardon me, my dear Madam! Montague is in the entail of his uncle Lord Waterville's property;—to say nothing of any little pittance I may have it in my power to bequeath him," replied the Dowager, swelling with importance. "But here we are in Seymour-street, I protest. I was going to ask you, as this is Saturday and an idle evening, if your Ladyship and the young ladies would favour me by taking a cup of tea in Hereford-street?"

Lady Maria, who had as much taste for the operation called "taking a cup of tea" as for taking a cup of hellebore, was delighted to feel herself handsomely provided with an excuse. "A thousand thanks, dearest Lady Monteagle! you are always so kind and considerate;—and nothing would give the girls so much pleasure as to pass a snug comfortable evening with you. But most unfortunately they have engaged themselves to accompany Lady Robert Lorton to the Opera."

"Humph!" ejaculated the Dowager, with a lowering brow. "Lady Robert Lorton!—now you know, my dear Lady Maria, you and I are old neighbours and friends; and I have, therefore, no hesitation in saying a word or two to you in the way of confidential advice. Beware of that Lady Robert Lorton! She is a very—*very*—unsafe companion for your daughters."

"You really alarm me!—anything affecting her character?"

"Character? Why not exactly; but she is one of the most giddy, inconsiderate, frivolous little creatures in the world! The habits of her house are extravagant beyond all belief, and will render your girls extremely discontented with home. And then, although she does not commit herself by any gross breach of decorum, she has acquired the character, in gentlemen's society, of being so vastly agreeable and fascinating, that we know she must have purchased her popularity by certain sacrifices to a certain extent!"

Lady Maria knew no such thing; but she *did* know that Lady Robert was the successful rival of Lady Stapylford in the *beau monde*, and that she had declined Lady Dynevour's

visits as being a bore of unequalled magnitude;—and formed her conclusions accordingly.

"How thoughtful—how obliging of you to put me on my guard! Depend on it, my dear Lady Monteagle, I will keep my eye upon all this! My poor unsuspecting girls have taken a prodigious fancy for her; and it would be imprudent to irritate either her or them by a premature rupture; by degrees, however, I shall wean them from her society. Farewell! I shall look in and inquire after your Ladyship's rheumatism to-morrow, in returning from church."

Lady Maria Willingham tripped gaily from the carriage, and flew to her daughters' dressing-room; where, after recounting the ill success of her mission, and the impertinence projected by Lady Willingham of appearing at the drawing-room in her own carriage, she passed full half an hour in demonstrating to them the value of Lady Robert Lorton's acquaintance. "Putting the Duke quite out of the question, my dear Claudia—and although Lady Grayfield's plan is a mere feint, I am convinced we shall make nothing of him—but putting the Duke of Lisborough wholly out of the question, I am convinced Lady Robert's friendship will form a most important resource to you. You see, my dears, she has no daughters to interfere with your interests; she is a little giddy woman, whose agreeable society attracts a circle of the best men; and she is wise enough to know that two very pretty lively girls will materially enhance the charm of her *coterie*, without prejudicing her own influence. The sort of men who flirt with married women have nothing to say to young ladies; and regular, heir-apparent, ten-thousand-a-year, domestic men—such as of course you would wish to ally yourselves with—may be found in Lady Robert's circle, although they would never entangle themselves in any silly affair of mere gallantry."

"Lady Robert has written since you have been out, Mamma, to beg that Claudia and I will dine with her to-day without ceremony; and, as she has offered to call for us, we have accepted the invitation."

"Quite right—quite right! I will take the opportunity to pay off a bore-debt by dining with the General. Quite right! under all the circumstances it will be extremely creditable to us to be seen on an intimate footing with the Duke's sister-in-law; besides she would scarcely invite you, unless some advantageous men were of the party; and there is no occasion on which a girl may make herself appear to so much advantage in the eyes of a marrying man, as a dinner. In the style of your conversation, my dear girls, always keep in mind the tone which might be supposed to suit a liberal country household—the tone which might give a man an idea

of your being calculated to do justice to the h[illegible]ours of his house, without neglecting his own domestic com[illegible]."

"Yes, Mamma!" said Claudia mildly. "And always to ask *his* opinion instead of giving our own."

"Oh! we are tolerably versed in our lesson," exclaimed Eleanor, half sarcastically. "We always talk of the happiness of our little fire-side circle, and the difficulty of tearing ourselves away from home. *Home!*" she reiterated in a bitter tone, gazing round the shabby limits of their little chamber. "But while we are discussing these tactics, we forget that it is time to dress; and if we neglect that important ceremony, all these fine sentiments will turn to very poor account!"

And so saying, she proceeded to entwine Mary Willingham's heaths into her glossy black hair; with due deference to Frederick Lorimer's decision in favour of the form of Grecian heads.

CHAPTER XI.

Vous, infidèle, avec votre air sucré,
Vous m'avez fait ce tour prematuré;
De votre cœur l'inconstance est précoce.

VOLTAIRE.

LADY ROBERT LORTON'S coterie was of a description more rare in London than in Paris; and perhaps more rare in modern Paris than in that of the *ancien régime*. Possessed of a character of elegance and refinement essentially different from the stately splendours of Lisborough House, it was distinguished by a certain tone of freedom and independence wholly untainted by dissoluteness;—by a slight tinge of literary taste utterly distinct from pedantry:—and by a degree of exclusiveness and selection so superior to the commonplace affectation of *finery*, that it created no offence even among the excluded. It was formed in short, by some half a dozen women of fashion, chiefly married ones—and somewhat more than twice that number of the opposite sex. These were selected neither from their rank, fortune, beauty, nor wisdom, but from a happy and moderate combination of all such qualifications;—or, to define the talismanic requisite for admission in one comprehensive word, they were valued in proportion to their power of being *agreeable*.

Persons of the most eminent virtue are oftentimes extremely tiresome! persons both wise and learned are frequently ill-tempered and peevish in their disposition; and

persons distinguished by the length of their parchments—whether of pedigree or rent-roll—are occasionally remarkable from their vulgarity of mind and address. An *agreeable* personage is one incapable of these faults;—one who, if wanting in the primary qualities recorded, is possessed of good gifts which atone for the deficiency. Lady Robert herself was noble, rich, lovely, witty, amiable, and eminently agreeable; and each among her numerous friends, if less *universally* qualified, was endowed with the latter gift, and at least *one* among the former. Even Lord Robert appeared to moderate his faults on entering the magic circle of his home; he was aware that his selfishness would meet with no sympathy or encouragement, and he wisely exerted his better powers to suppress or at least to conceal the defect.

In society of this description, Claudia and Eleanor Willingham found ready acceptance; their beauty, and elegance, and accomplishments were duly appreciated; and as they were cunning enough to keep their pretensions out of sight, they provoked neither envy nor opposition. There was not one of this chosen set who would not have rejoiced at Claudia's union with the Duke of Lisborough;—first, to mortify Lady Grayfield, who was regarded as mean and intractable and narrow-minded; and next, to attach his Grace more particularly to their own circle, with all his mighty capabilities of increasing its stock of pleasures and enjoyments. They were well aware of his dulness and solemnity; but then his unique mansion in town—his beautiful country seat and delicious villa—conferred even upon *him* the power of being agreeable. His high-breeding and good-nature were also qualities of no mean account in the calculation.

Lady Robert's dinner-party was confined to two or three men;—not *advantageous* men, as specified by Lady Maria's maternal solicitudes—but middle-aged personages, with a certain income to maintain a position in society, and leave the vulgar cares of life out of sight;—who, from their currency in the fashionable world, had always a fund of novelties to contribute to the joint stock of general discourse, without affecting the odious colloquial displays of what is called a conversation-man;—whose good breeding was powerful to disguise, where it could not repress ill-temper;—who were always ready, in short, to amuse and to be amused. Her opera-box was visited, but not crowded, by several of the younger male members of her own coterie; men of rank and fashion and elegance, who came without undue eagerness, and departed without ceremony;—*not* to flirt—not to affect elaborate efforts of wit and gaiety—but to recount their own observations of the day, and to interest themselves in those of Lady Robert Lorton. It was evident, from their ease of mind and manners, that the society to which they

belonged was well-organized—matched in mo[illegible] after the fashion of the hounds in Theseus,

Like bells each under each.

The loss of a single member of this little knot of associates must manifestly have become the origin of discord.

"We shall sup with Lady Barringhurst," whispered Lady Robert to her young friends, as they were waiting the arrival of the carriage, shortly after the commencement of the ballet.

"We have not the pleasure of knowing her," replied Eleanor, with some degree of hesitation.

"She saw you last night at the Duke's, and begged me to bring you. I mentioned the scheme to Lady Maria, who gave her august consent; and thus I shall have the pleasure of presenting you at once to all my friends."

Arrived at the scene of action in New Norfolk-street, the Willingham's began to congratulate themselves on the invitation. An elegant, but unostentatious supper-table was prepared with about five-and-twenty covers, and the room was soon filled with the *élite* of the *élite* of London. Lady Barringhurst herself was a woman of about thirty; extremely lovely, but singularly calm and undemonstrative in her countenance and address.

"I call her my consolation," said Lady Robert to Eleanor Willingham. "She has one of those happy dispositions which cannot be persuaded that anything wrong or gloomy exists in the world. She sees everything on its bright side! Without being insensible or indiscriminating, she is endowed with so gentle a temperament, as to be incapable of suspicion or despondency. Whenever I am cross or unhappy, I contrive to seek Lucy Barringhurst's society; and without boring me with persuasions, or arguments, or harangues, she makes me feel that I am to blame, and puts the whole instrument in tune in half an hour. After this preamble, you will readily believe that her husband and children are the happiest people in the world. Lord Barringhurst is chained to the galley of politics; and being blest with a somewhat clumsy intellect, he is always getting into some public scrape or other, and making himself the badger of the House. Any other man would have been worried into his coffin ten years ago; but Lucy smoothes down his ruffled feathers with so gentle and so unostentatious a hand, that he scarcely recognizes his misfortunes."

"A charming character!" observed Eleanor, gazing upon Lady Barringhurst's swan-like grace and dazzling fairness, as she glided from friend to friend, breathing to each, with involuntary discrimination, some surprisingly acceptable

phrase or comment. "She appears a most lovely and loveable creature." But Eleanor's admiration was secretly lavished rather on the charms of her Ladyship's diamond necklace than upon those of her disposition!

"The bright brunette who has just now entered the room," continued Lady Robert, "forms a strange contrast with Lucy's tranquil sweetness. Lady Barringhurst soothes me when I am unhappy;—Mrs. Grandison diverts me when I am dull. She is a living sunbeam—sparkling, and evanescent—a very meteor of brilliant irregularity;—neither her words nor her actions are amenable to calculation; and her indifference to public opinion constantly incurs the stigma of levity. She has the kindest heart in the world; yet her sarcastic wit in fastening upon general follies, has often been resented as conveying personal satire. I am rather afraid of her myself; but I confess that no one amuses me half so well. Ah! here is Sir George Wolryche—that newest and best edition of the Scandalous Chronicle. He traduces us all to our very faces, and makes us laugh at caricatures of our individual selves."

"Claudia, I perceive, has met with some of her Calmersfield friends. Is the Duke himself a member of your set?"

"Occasionally;—he would bore us if he came often, and *we* should bore *him*; for poor Lisborough is accustomed to a degree of exclusive homage, such as we are very little accustomed to pay to any one. I suspect he is coming to-night; for the set of young men who now surround your sister are the mere pages to our own true knights and esquires; a tribe of younger brothers, who are too poor to be fine-gentlemen-proper, and are therefore fine-gentlemen-reflective. They ape and toady Lisborough, and dine and drive with him accordingly. Henry Mulgrave has a delicious voice, and sings romances;—Sir Comyne Wallace dances like Mercury;—and Lord Cosmo Somerset is the wittiest and readiest of epigrammatists. But stay! I see a new man among them—Mr. Lorimer—your admirer of last night, I protest! I wish you joy, my dear Eleanor; for although I fear he is a mere objectionable, yet it always gives a girl a certain vogue in her first season to have a presentable man of good family dying for love of her."

"Mr. Lorimer, however, appears exceedingly disposed to live; he is at present as animated as your friend, Mrs. Grandison."

"I beg, my dear, that you will reduce him to Iceland moss without further delay. It is a most impertinent thing in a younger brother to look like a thriving suitor. He is coming this way, and I shall go and make my own recognitions at the other end of the room, in order to leave ample space for the massacre."

Claudia, meanwhile, who was receiving the incense of all

the juvenile members of the society, and looking as surpassingly lovely as a beauty, courted and flattered, generally looks, was astonished to perceive that the entrance of the Duke of Lisborough produced little or no sensation in the room; that at Lady Barringhurst's he was only *one of the party!* This singular indifference proceeded from the absence of all manœuvring mammas. From the little coterie, besides herself and her sister, there was but one unmarried woman present; and that one—Lady Barbara Desmond—was herself so superior—so exquisitely the fashion—so pretty, and animated, and distinguished—that she had nothing to gain from his Grace's attentions. She had every possible pretension and qualification to be selected as his Duchess; and moreover, it was pretty evident that such a selection would have been requited with contempt by the most elegant and *enjouée* little elf that ever wandered from fairyland! As to Lady Desmond, she was too fond, both of her daughter's society and of her own amusement, to occupy herself with any matrimonial scheming.

Mrs. Grandison, who was eminent for that species of lively *naïveté*, which the old and ugly generally translate into coquetry, soon peremptorily monopolized his Grace's attention, and placed him next to herself at supper; but by a fortunate coincidence, Claudia Willingham and Sir Comyne Wallace were stationed exactly opposite; and although the Duke knew that *he* was too poor to be a marrying man, he also knew that he was accounted the greatest connoisseur in female beauty among those whose oracles are omniscient in the memorable bay-window in St. James's-street; and that the young Baronet was almost as powerful as himself in conferring the immortalities of fashion upon the object of his adoration. Sir Comyne smiled, and the Duke became inattentive to Mrs. Grandison's arts;—Sir Comyne sighed, and his Grace found himself obliged to swallow a glass of iced maraschino;—Sir Comyne whispered, and Claudia blushed in her turn—and the fastidious Lisborough was visited by a symptom of jealousy, of rare occurrence to his unsusceptible frame;—that burning thrill through the head, which is instantly followed by a chilly and aguish shiver throughout the whole person. The poor Duke was as perplexed as Othello himself!

Unversed in similar casualties—wholly unaccustomed to find the object of *his* choice engrossed by another, Lisborough played but an awkward part in the pageant;—he had recourse to the obsolete and common-place manœuvre of retaliation. But the stars were in combination against him; and on turning towards his other female neighbour, Lady Barbara Desmond, with the intention of a desperate flirtation, such as might prove more alarming to Claudia's pride than his little skirmishes of unmeaning gallantry with Mrs. Grandison, he

found the garrison already invested. Her Ladyship was not only engrossed by the unobtrusive adulation of the most entertaining of younger brothers, Henry Mulgrave, but received his Grace's solemn advances, and ponderous compliments, with an air of the most supercilious indifference. Claudia was avenged!—and she had the spirit to pursue her advantage, by listening, with her sweetest smiles, to the whispered flatteries distilled, on either side, into her ears. She carefully averted her observation from the fickle Duke; but she suspected, and with justice, that he was equally dissatisfied with *her*, with Sir Comyne, and with himself.

Frederick Lorimer, in the mean time, had dexterously secured a chair next to that of Eleanor Willingham; and as she had been conducted to the supper-table by Lord Robert Lorton, *he* at least had nothing to fear from a rival.

"Do you often join Lady Barringhurst's parties?" inquired Eleanor.

"This is my first appearance here; and I insist upon it that you bestow your patronage on me, in order that I may appear very lively and agreeable, and be invited again. I have given you out as my cousin; your reputation is, therefore, in some degree implicated in my success."

"I see nothing here to justify any violent effort either on your part or mine. Lady Robert's set of friends is, at least, ten years too old for us;—no dancing—no music—no animation."

"I have no time to spare for fastidiousness. In a month I shall leave England for a considerable period; and my immediate business is to crowd as much happiness into that space of time as I possibly can. Lady Robert Lorton is your friend;—at her house, and in her little circle, I shall be secure of seeing *you*, and I have consequently no happiness to seek elsewhere."

"To what part of the Continent are you bound?—We have friends established in divers countries—can our letters be of any service to you?"

"Do not ask me! I have already forgotten whither I am going. Three nights ago, I could have enlarged surprisingly upon my tour, its views, and intentions;—but from last night I date the period of a new existence; and now I remember nothing but that I am a miserable hopeless younger brother."

"Your words sound very despondingly; and yet I see nothing but triumph in your countenance."

"Indeed!—how shall I account for the hypocrisy of my face, which does so little justice to my feelings?"

"Allow *me* to unravel the mystery. Your sensations have no twofold power. You are very happy just now. You have an excellent supper before you;—your Champagne is well-iced; the society around you is in good humour; the room is

and shrewdness. He felt persuaded that Miss Westland's uncles, cousins, and nephews, would push him on in his profession, and in this he was not disappointed; and that Miss Westland's comely self would prove a stirring, manœuvring, aspiring woman, ready and willing to scold his servants and legislate his affairs. But in this he decidedly reckoned without his hostess. It was fortunate for his love of ease that his rise was sufficiently rapid to afford him the succour of the aides-de-camp during the war, and secretaries, clerks, registrars, and particularly privy-councillors, during the piping times of peace. Notwithstanding his connexion with the Westland dynasty, government took very good care that he should have neither opportunity nor excuse for acting or judging for himself; but he wore his regimentals on public days with a very good grace; and sat at the head of his table in a manner which proved highly conciliatory to the whole colony.

Like every human thing beside connected with the house of Westland, General De Vesci, without anxiety and without exertion—nay! almost insensibly, found that he had acquired a very handsome fortune by eating currie and drinking salt-petred claret. For forty years these avocations, and the catastrophic curtailment of his military pigtail, had been his only exertions; yet, through some error authorized by the genius of finance, he had become possessed of vested funds to the amount of ten thousand a-year. The Lieutenant-Governor assured him that it was impossible he could have accumulated so large a sum of money, without at the same time acquiring a liver complaint; and having lent, with officious and official cunning, "A Treatise on Blue Pill," to Mrs. De Vesci, the devoted couple soon began to see visions of Cheltenham, and to dream dreams of Portland-place. In process of purser's despatches, the worthy Governor's resignation was received and accepted in Downing-street; and Colonel Document, C. B.—the proprieter of the treatise—was appointed to reign in his stead!

On the arrival of the "good teak country-built ship, the Harry Inglis," in the docks, poor General De Vesci, like most Colonial exiles of forty years standing, found that he had outlived all his family and half his contemporaries; and it was not until he had imbibed several ton of the Cheltenham waters, and hailed the return of his niece, Lady Maria, from the Continent, that he could be prevailed upon to bestow his hearty forgiveness upon himself for having followed the crafty Document's advice. Yet even with this solitary scion of his family tree, he did not feel completely satisfied. He had been so long accustomed to the slumberous indolence of Eastern ladies, and to the still more somnolent self-extinction of his domestic partner, that he found Lady Maria's Gallic animation fatiguing, and the liveliness of her daughters extremely unbecoming. There were many domestic points, too, which

he could not immediately reconcile to his feelings. Lady Maria had never been able to give a very distinct account of the final destination of a certain yellow parrot which he had formerly sent over to his sister-in-law, her dowager parent;—and Claudia and Eleanor had taken the liberty, in his presence, of pronouncing Atar of Roses to be a plebeian and insupportable perfume!

He was too cordial-hearted, however, to cherish any malice against the offenders; and excepting that he could not bribe them to waste as much time as he desired in his gilded desert in Portman-square, he had very little fault to find with the Willinghams. I have said that he was a tall, showy, fine-looking man; and as many of his droppers-in and habitual diners found it their interest to assure him that his handsome nieces exactly resembled him, he soon grew nearly as fond of them as of himself. As he interfered very little in their personal diversions, and was always prompt to adorn them with a new dress or new necklace for a new fête, Claudia and Eleanor were very well satisfied, meanwhile, to repay the General's kindness by walking or riding with him, or by singing Mrs. De Vesci into her habitual evening doze. At length, however, as uncles—and particularly *rich* uncles—will do, he took it into his well-powdered head to grow officious and disagreeable.

It were unjust to allow the responsibility of such a change to rest solely upon his own ex-governatorial shoulders. Although he boasted no longer of secretary, or judge advocate, to supply him with motives, yet extrinsic influence was not wanting. He had the whole tribe of Westland to prompt him into action; and as they dine in Portman-square often enough to strengthen their collateral connexion with the Willinghams, they were sufficiently obliging to inscribe the names of his nieces in their own family catalogue; and to calculate upon Claudia's charms among their own ways and means of rising in the world.

"My dear General," observed Sir Hew Westland, the Major General and K. C. B. of the omniscient gang, "are you aware that all London is talking of a marriage between the Duke of Lisborough and the eldest Miss Willingham?"

"Mere rumour! my dear Sir, mere idle rumour, you may rely upon it. My niece Lady Maria has been passing the holidays at Calmersfield Park—an occurrence of no especial moment—since the rank of the De Vesci family, and an ancient alliance with the house of Lorton, absolutely *entitle* her Ladyship to association with his Grace; and this slight coincidence has been magnified by the gossips of London, and the prying impertinence of the newspapers, into a matrimonial connexion."

"Ah!" interrupted Sir Thomas, the Director, filling his

glass with claret as he spoke, "we know how to receive *your* diplomatic explanation, General. But the fact is, my dear Sir, the thing is no longer a mystery; and you must therefore allow me to offer my congratulations."

"It is, at least, a mystery to *me*," rejoined the General pompously; "and if you will interrogate your sister, I think she will satisfactorily confirm my explanation. Annabella, my dear!" elevating his voice with a view to penetrate poor Mrs. De Vesci's impracticable ears; "have you any reason to suppose that either of my nieces is under any sort of matrimonial engagement?"

"My dear did you speak to me?"

"The General inquires, sister, whether you are aware that Miss Willingham is going to be married to the Duke of Lisborough."

"I should not be much surprised if she were going to be married to somebody."

"Certainly not, my dear sister. So lovely a girl—what could be more natural?—But what is your *particular* reason for expecting such a thing just now?"

"I beg your pardon."

"What makes you think that Claudia is engaged?" inquired the General, very loud, and somewhat angrily.

"Oh! nothing, my dear, nothing! Only she was here this morning, and I was telling her how very uneasy I was all day yesterday about my Angola cat."

"Well?"

"And she said—I forgot what it was she said—but she did not seem to care the least about poor Minette."

Sir Robert pushed the ponderous decanter impatiently towards his cousin the Commissioner, who was busy with a very long pinch of snuff.

"Seriously, my dear De Vesci, were *I* in your place, I should think it my duty to inquire a little into this business. After all, *you* stand, as it were, *in loco parentis* to these young women. Lady Maria is a very estimable person, but it may be doubted whether she have stamina enough to conduct a negotiation of so much delicacy and moment. Women, you know, General—women are too easily swayed by their passions, to proceed to business with fitting deliberation;—and considering the importance of an alliance with the Duke of Lisborough, I think it would have been only respectful and becoming on her Ladyship's part, had she referred herself, in the first instance, to your opinion."

"And so she does refer herself to her uncle's opinion," drawlingly interrupted Mrs. De Vesci, who was soaking spunge biscuits for her fat lapdog. "It was but yesterday she was consulting him about laying in a stock of East

India Madeira; and the General sent her in twelve dozen this morning—didn't you, General?"

"Macclesfield announced half an hour ago, that the candles were lighted in the drawing-room, Annabella," observed the ex-governor emphatically;—so emphatically, that Sir Hew arose and opened the dining-room door for the egress of his portly cousin's rustling lustring dress; while Mrs. De Vesci, with a wine-glass in one hand, and a collection of almonds for her parrot in the other, rolled herself, as if upon castors, out of the room.

"I certainly consider the matter worth attending to," resumed the General, stretching himself, and considerably relieved by her exit. "Sir Joseph Willingham is a very respectable man. God forbid that I should disparage the intellect of a dignitary of the church and an ancient Baronet." (He loved to have a fling at the new-fangled honours of his stupid wife's relations). "But after all, Sir Joseph Willingham is by no means a man of the world—is a mere provincial; and it is therefore no undue assumption on my part, I trust, to assert that *I* am far better qualified myself to bring an affair of this kind to a crisis."

"Certainly, certainly!—I have very little doubt that a little judicious interference on your part would bring his Grace's intentions to a decision."

"I shall give my unbiassed attention to the business," said the General, frowning himself into a reflective air; "for in all probability the Duke of Lisborough is only waiting for some overture from the head of Lady Maria Willingham's family. My nephew, Lord De Vesci, is still in Ireland, and I am therefore authorized in considering myself as *pro tempore* the head of the house."

The conversation now turned upon the high importance of the Lorton family, whether financially or parliamentarily considered; and the Duke was praised—as opulent Dukes are generally praised—for all those universal minor virtues which can easily be fitted on to every human character. The Westlands decided that his Grace was very superior to the ordinary run of young men of the day; and that it would be Miss Willingham's own fault if she did not become, before the close of the season, the liege lady of himself and Lisborough House.

On the following morning, long before the exterior residue of its eggs and French rolls had been removed from the breakfast-table in Seymour-street, the General entered the room with a very admonitory air. He listened impatiently to Lady Maria's account of a dinner at Lord Lorimer's the day before; and in the midst of her anticipation of Mrs. Grandison's ball that evening, he burst forth into a preconcerted harangue, admitting of no interruption. So widely,

indeed did its arguments extend—so much did he say of the claims of kindred, of personal affection, family alliances, and his own especial predilection for herself and her daughters—that Lady Maria immediately decided her uncle was come to announce the signature of his will;—and even the girls, who were in sanguine expectation of a morning visit from the Duke of Lisborough, and who were therefore in an agony of anxiety to go and put the finishing stroke to their toilet, judged it advisable to assume a sentimental air and linger patiently over their coffee-cups.

Words, therefore, are insufficient to depict the consternation which pervaded the countenances of the three, when General De Vesci unexpectedly diverged into the views he had recently imbibed from the Westland clan; setting forth his intentions of immediate interference, and insinuating some trifling displeasure that his opinions on the subject had not been already consulted.

Claudia and Eleanor telegraphed a look of despair across the table, while Lady Maria mildly attempted to moderate the excess of his zeal.

"My dear Sir," she exclaimed, "can you for a moment suppose, that had the Duke's attentions to my daughter assumed anything beyond the form of common courtesy, you would have been permitted to remain in ignorance of the affair? Oh! my dear, dear uncle! you must surely be too well persuaded of my poor girl's grateful affection towards you to indulge in such an illusion. The Duke of Lisborough has done no more than pay us ordinary attention in requital of former hospitality;—but the world is *so* jealous—*so* ill-natured!"

"I perceive nothing jealous or ill-natured in projecting an alliance between the Duke and Miss Willingham."

"*You*, my dear General, you, who know so much of the world—of the great world—cannot fail to recognize that this sort of premature report is almost prohibitory of the event; and that the most delicate forbearance is requisite in conducting an affair, which the interest of so many different persons is leagued to circumvent."

"That is the *very* consideration, my dear Maria, which induces me to come forward at the present juncture. I believe I may say it without compliment to myself, that I, who have so long been engaged in a diplomatic career—I, who have had the responsibilities of government—his Majesty's representative government—hanging on my hands—can pretend to the adjustment of a negotiation of this description far better than even yourself."

"But no *negotiation* has been yet thought of, dear uncle," impatiently interrupted Eleanor.

The general waved an angry negative with his ungloved hand.

"Nor will *ever* be, Miss Eleanor, without some effort on my part. As your nearest male relative, it becomes a duty incumbent on myself to see that no improper trifling in the Duke of Lisborough's conduct throws a slur upon any female connected, however remotely, with the family of De Vesci. I shall therefore take some strong and immediate measure towards an explanation."

Claudia and Eleanor silently hazarded a glance of sympathy towards each other.

"Or perhaps I should acknowledge—for *we* official men"—with a self-important smile—"we official men are not in the habit of hanging fire on such occasions—perhaps I should candidly avow—that I have already taken it."

"Good Heavens, Sir!" ejaculated the usually impassive Claudia, suddenly rising and clasping her hands, "what *have* you done?"

"And without so much as consulting us," added Eleanor with indignation.

"My dear nieces, I trust I require no suggestion from yourselves, or *any* one, relative to the line of conduct to be pursued on an occasion involving a point of family honour.—I have simply done my duty!"

"Well, Sir?" faintly inquired Lady Maria. The General drew himself up with an air of considerable dignity. "I have invited the Duke of Lisborough to dinner on the 4th of next month!"

Relieved by this very unexpected announcement, the girls gazed upon each other with a smile of mutual congratulation. Still, although the evil was of a very minor kind, they felt that it *was* an evil. They were well aware that the Duke was by no means in the habit of wandering from his own orbit; or rather, that living as the centre of attraction to a little sphere of his own, and possessing the power of commanding pleasure and amusement, according to the suggestion of his personal whims, he seldom placed himself at the mercy of other people's invitations. But regrets were vain—the deed was done; and it only remained for them to qualify, by their own ingenuity, its appalling consequences.

"But, my dear General!" observed Lady Maria, with as much courtesy as she could assume, while boiling with indignation, "your acquaintance in town is at present so very limited—you have as yet taken so little trouble towards the renewal of your former connexions, that I cannot conceive how you will ever make out a party to meet the Duke of Lisborough. You must be aware that he confines himself to a very exclusive set."

"In honouring my dinner-table with his presence, he ex-

tends it for the occasion to *my* guests, whoever they may be; and I trust they are never of a class to reflect discredit on his Grace."

"*Discredit!* oh! dear no, Sir! But fashion you know, my dear uncle, fashion is a most arbitrary, a most peremptory code."

"I conceive, Madam, that a certain rank in life is sufficient to elevate one wholly above its influence. Fashion, Lady Maria, may become a badge of distinction to an upstart such as a Mr. Brummell; but I presume to imagine that persons of rank, such as the Duke of Lisborough and General de Vesci, are exempted from so contemptible a tax."

Eleanor shrugged her shoulders, and left the table in despair.

"Besides, your Ladyship appears to forget that his Grace is as closely my relative as your own."

"I am well aware that there is some remote connexion between the Lortons and De Vescis; but *our* acquaintance with the Duke arose from frequent meetings on the Continent, where we moved in the same circle."

"*Remote* connexion? Surely you are not ignorant that James, the thirteeth Duke of Lisborough, was son to Lord Adolphus Lorton, by Mildred, the daughter of John, fourth Earl of Chesterville, whose grandmother was a De Vesci?—REMOTE connexion!—I was explaining the whole affair the other morning at Brookes's to Lord Robert Lorton; by whose air and address, by the way, I was by no means captivated. He has all the coldness and listlessness of the late Duke, without any of his graceful dignity. While I was talking to him, there came up a very elegant young man, who requested his Lordship to present him to me as a near relative of your late mother, Lady de Vesci's;—a Mr. Lorimer, a very respectful, agreeable, modest young gentleman. He spoke of having recently made your acquaintance; and I invited him to visit me in Portman-square."

"I consider Mr. Frederick Lorimer as a very forward person," said Lady Maria pettishly, while Eleanor re-seated herself at the table. "I have no idea of younger brothers presuming upon family connexion to push themselves into one's society. There is nothing so disadvantageous as to have a parcel of detrimentals loitering and lounging about a house frequented by young ladies of a marrying age. But to return to your dinner, General. *Whom* do you think of inviting to meet the Duke?"

"Yourselves, of course; and the ladies of a party once settled, the men become of minor importance. I can easily fill up my table."

"Pardon me, dear Sir—the male guests of a dinner-party are by far the most difficult to adjust to the taste of their own

sex. To form an unpleasant female acquaintance is an affair of minor moment; but to be forced into collision with a vulgar or obscure man, would be martyrdom to a person so fastidious as the Duke."

"I flatter myself Mrs. De Vesci's family is neither vulgar nor obscure. I shall invite all the Westlands."

"Good God! you surely do not think of such a thing! Men who were never dreamt of on the southern side of Oxford-street!"

"Lady Maria Willingham, you forget yourself. Sir Hew Westland is a distinguished officer in his Majesty's service——"

"Of whom one never hears, except in the newspaper list of a *lévée*—or on occasion of a frame-breaking at Nottingham."

"Sir Thomas Westland, Madam, is a Director of the Honourable East India Company."

Lady Maria groaned.

"Sir Philip is a banker of considerable eminence, and is, moreover, married to the niece of the late Attorney General."

"My dear uncle," interrupted Eleanor, who was less in awe of the General than either her mother or sister; "what are all these people to the Duke? He never heard of them, nor *will* ever hear of them in the course of his existence! Except in such places as Bedford-square, or Devonshire-place, the Westland family rank among the nonentities of the earth. Invite them to meet your stock-broker, your solicitor, or your physician, and they will pass for High Mightinesses; —their names and designations will maintain them. But in a certain set, to be unknown is to be infamous. The Duke of Lisborough never finds himself among strangers; and he would consider it an affront to be invited among a tribe of Hottentots like the Westlands."

"Upon *my* word, Miss Eleanor," the General began——

"Dearest Nelly! how can you be so imprudent?" interrupted Claudia.

"It is much better to speak out, in such a crisis," persisted Eleanor Willingham bluntly. "My uncle's only wish on this occasion is to benefit ourselves; he is not aware of the Duke's fastidious and supercilious ways; and it is much more candid to forewarn him of the truth."

General De Vesci, who was really a kind-hearted man, appeared pacified by this explanation, and inclined to treat the whole business jocosely.

"Well—my fair counsellor!—and *you*, who are so well versed in the art and science of dinner-giving—what amendment do *you* suggest? Who, of all my acquaintance, are fine enough to be admitted into our scheme?"

"Oh! you must give Mamma *carte blanche*, and she will arrange it all with Mrs. De Vesci."

"In the mean time, you will allow me to learn the names of my future guests."

"Oh! there is the new Neapolitan ambassador, Prince Agostino Sciarrha, on whom you called yesterday. The Princess is our particular friend, and a very charming woman. *They*, I am sure, will be delighted to come; and they will bring one of their *attachés*, who is a great *protégé* of the Duke of Lisborough's, the Duca di Villa Armagnano."

The General, who was a great lover of great names, became somewhat appeased by this euphonious promise. "And your relations, the Lorimers, Lady Maria?—Lord Lorimer left his card on me at the beginning of the season, and her Ladyship and Mrs. De Vesci have exchanged visits;—only Annabella is so unobservant that she never can be made to distinguish Lady Lorimer from her daughters. How many of the family ought I to include in the invitation?"

"The Lorimers! They are as *mauvais ton* as the Westlands!—They belong to a class of the nobility who are utterly unknown in the fashionable world;—who lend themselves out as stars, to all the vulgar second-rate parties; and affect to be too wise or too good for the *beau monde*, which despises them. If you like, you can invite the eldest son. He lives very little with his own family, and will probably achieve better things;—he is considered a rising young man."

"And Mr. Frederick?"

"A younger brother who is not in Parliament, and who neither writes books, nor is considered attached to some leading woman of fashion, is a mere blank," said Lady Maria, angrily. "Pray, Sir, spare us the infliction of any such Mr. Johns and Mr. Thomases. You are acquainted with Mr. Russell—Beau Russell, I mean. Ask *him*, and Sir Comyne Wallace, whom I presented to you at the Opera. Old Lord Hopemell is not a bad style of man, although rather out of date;—and I should think the Duke would not object to meet Lord Masterton, the ex-Governor General, although they differ so widely in politics. But, at all events, Sir, you can wait till you receive the Duke's answer;—it is by no means certain at present that he will accept your invitation."

"By Heavens! you are all Lisborough mad!" exclaimed the General, closing his snuff-box with an irritable jerk, and taking up his hat in a pet. "I might have invited half the Royal Family, with a quarter of the fuss."

"The Royal Family! I should think so," reiterated Eleanor flippantly. "Who ever thought of comparing the Royal Family in point of *fashion* with the Duke of Lisborough!"

"Stark mad!" muttered the General, pulling his hat over

his brows, and leaving the house. "Poor unfortunate girls! Their residence on the Continent has deprived them of even the moderate portion of understanding they received as their birthright. His Grace, in marrying Claudia, will do well to provide strait-waistcoats for the whole family!"

CHAPTER XIII.

Voilà de jeunes gens qui ont fait trop tôt le tour de leur planète.
SENAC DE MEILHAN.

"WHAT did you lose after I left the table last night, Stapylford?" inquired Sir Comyne Wallace of Lord Stapylford's son, who was lounging on the down sofa of his apartment at Mivart's. "Anything heavy?"

"On my soul! I forget," replied the yawning Stapylford, passing a white hand through his perfumed curls, and crumpling with the other the Morning Post into a toss-ball. "Tichborne!" said he, elevating his drawl to address a particular friend, who, dressed as his *double*, was busily engaged at the breakfast-table, with the wreck of a *pâté de foie gras*. "Tichborne! what did I lose? I saw you booking it all."

"Don't destroy my small relic of appetite by adverting to the subject, there's a worthy fellow. We lost last night—for we played together—more than it is pleasant to think of this morning."

Sir Comyne went to the window, and began to polish Mr. Mivart's plate-glass with the tassel of his cane, by way of concealing a smile. Both, from the active evidence before him, and from his certain knowledge that Tichborne had not a shilling of his own either to spend or to hazard, he thought it improbable the young gentleman's appetite would suffer on the present occasion.

"Why were you not both at Mrs. Grandison's ball? Your family were all there, Tichborne; and you know, Stapylford, I offered to get you a card."

"Oh! curse balls!" replied the *double*, ringing for a glass of Curaçoa or Scubac, to qualify the unctuous *pâté*. "We looked in at the Opera for an hour, and saw all Mrs. Grandison's set in their ball finery; but except Lady Robert Lorton, who was sparkling like an ill-set diamond in a hideous hat, and the two pretty Willinghams, there was nothing to tempt a man to forget himself into the milk-and-water common-place of a ball-room."

"That Lady Barringhurst, your cousin, is a very lovely piece of human nature," said the boy-voluptuary, who was

busy with his ball; "she looks like a swansdown-muff, or my poodle, after he has been washed in milk of roses."

Tichborne echoed the witling with the ready laugh of a *double*; but his cheek was flushed, and his eye sparkled with an angry glance. "And what had you new at Mrs. Grandison's, Wallace?"

"Oh! nothing new. But a thousand old things which might have amused you better than losing your money at Crockford's. In the first place a supper, the very recollection of which might have superseded the necessity of a further breach upon that ruined *pâté*."

"We did not sup ill at Crocky's," said young Stapylford, swallowing a glass of Scubac with leisurely enjoyment.

"One never does; but having paid for those gratuitous suppers at the rate of a *rouleau* a mouthful, they always give me a fit of indigestion. Now, at Mrs. Grandison's I felt the cost to be at the expense of a rich banker's vanity. I believe they had the President of the Royal Society to inspect the cooling of the wines—no ice!—it was all a chemical operation;—and the strawberries were brought to table growing in China saucers, that we might hail them in all their horticultural freshness."

"Well imagined!—that Mrs. Grandison is not destitute of genius," observed Tichborne. "But what made *her* give a ball?—it is contrary to the system of her circle."

"Oh! I fancy she is rather breaking out of Lady Robert Lorton's set; she is too vivacious, and not sufficiently well-bred for their indolent easy mode of happiness. She likes a little *tracasserie*—a little mischief to keep her alive;—and her present mania is to achieve the legislation of Lisborough House; she wants to get that overgrown baby into leading-strings."

"Absurd! She has all the influence which beauty—and all the enjoyments which money can give;—besides the adoration of a husband who would pave Portland-place with rubies to please her! Why cannot she be satisfied without throwing away her reputation?"

"*La belle Grandison* has a very active spirit, which cannot exist without the exertion of manœuvring. A difficulty to overcome is a great temptation to a genius like hers."

"But where's the difficulty of winning the attentions of a person so fickle as the Duke of Lisborough?"

"None, I grant you;—but to *retain* them?"

"More trouble than they are worth."

"Than *they* are worth. But you omit from the balance the dear delight of giving pain;—the pleasure of irritating Our Lady of the farthingale—the austere Lady Grayfield—and baffling the manœuvres of the lovely Claudia Willingham."

"Or making that simple little daisy, Lady Anastasia Burgoyne, shut up its leaves and die."

"By heavens! it was quite exquisite to see the Duke the other night at Lord Monmouth's concert. You know he is a furious amateur, and cannot endure to be flirted with, within scrape of an orchestra; so when Mrs. Grandison grew too kind, and too tiresome, Lisborough went and took refuge behind the skirts of Lady Grayfield's clothing, by way of not knowing her, and of being shocked at her proceedings."

"The advantage of having a virtuous sister!" exclaimed Sir Comyne. "It is really lucky that the Duke has such a buckler of defence against his fair friends; for upon my soul it is disgusting to see the manner in which he is invaded on all sides. And yet, faith! I should not dislike playing *Il Turco* for a few weeks after his Grace's fashion—letting all the fair Odalisques come and kiss the dust of my sublime feet. *Your* turn will come soon, Stapylford. When you inherit your uncle's fortune, and put on your coronet, you will find yourself obliged to assume a spiked collar, *à la* bull-dog, to escape being worried."

"I detest women," drawled the youthful Alcibiades. "They are so cursedly selfish. The strongest affection never surmounts *their* egotism, while from *us* they expect every possible sacrifice."

Tichborne laughed heartily, and Sir Comyne Wallace ironically, at this sally.

"You know them, at present, through their worst representatives. I am persuaded, my dear fellow, you never found courage to enter into conversation with anything in the shape of a lady, except that frightful sister of Charles Willingham's, at Heddeston."

"Whom old Monteagle, my grandmother, seriously advised me to marry! By way of frightening the ancient soul into an apoplexy, I told her I was already engaged to little Minnie, who will never have a shilling———"

"Hush! here comes Lorimer! he is somehow or other connected with those Willinghams. Lorimer, my fine fellow—how are you?"

"Why looks your Grace so heavily to-day?" inquired Stapylford.

"Because he is in *dis*grace," said Tichborne, laughing at his own wit. "Its papa has protested a bill—or its mamma———"

"My dear Tichborne," said Frederick Lorimer, sarcastically, "be satisfied with quizzing your own parents; mine must remain my especial property."

"But you have really a most wo-begone and indignant air," said young Stapylford. "Out with it, man;—swear a little at somebody or other, and you will be better. Who has affronted you?—which of your friends here present is to be your 'friend?' Who stands first to be your second?"

A waiter now entered the room with certain despatches from Mr. Stapylford's head groom to Mr. Tichborne; on the strength of which, having swallowed two consecutive glasses of liqueur, drawn his waistcoat and black stock into their respective and relative positions before the looking-glass and filled his morocco cigar-case from Stapylford's tin-treasury, he announced his intention of proceeding to the stables; where some mysterious operation was going on, which was said by Irish Bob to necessitate his inspection. There was nothing, indeed, particularly degrading to Lord Henry Tichborne's son in the office of stud-groom, which he thus appeared to arrogate to himself:—the horses which bore Mr. Stapylford's name being far more his own property. He rode them all the winter at Melton—all the summer in the Park; and whatever money was won upon them in the course—at Hampton, or Goodwood, or Croxton Park—all found its way into Mr. Tichborne's pocket.

"I am come to inquire whether you have any message to Charles Willingham, or any commands to Oxford at large?" said Lorimer, as soon as the *double* had sworn his way out of the room. "I am off by the mail this evening."

"And what says the fair Eleanor to your scheme of departure?" said Sir Comyne, apparently as much relieved as Frederick Lorimer by the absence of their dear friend's dear friend. "Methought I saw you whispering her somewhat closely in Mrs. Grandison's Abysinian tent-room last night; and it seemed to me that she turned neither a deaf nor an angry ear."

"What can a wretched younger brother like *myself* find to urge that is likely to win the attention of a lovely girl like *herself?*"

"That which pleases most lovely girls;—that you are madly in love with her; and are hesitating between Prussic acid and oxalic, to put a period to your woes;—just such trash as I talked the other night to her fair sister Claudia, by way of exasperating that leather-and-prunella automaton, Lisborough;—who, by the way, takes the liberty of trifling with women's affections in a manner that often induces me to wish I had a pretty sister of my own, for the prospect of calling him out."

"And yet you jestingly recommend me to trifle in a similar manner with Eleanor Willingham's?"

"*I* recommend any measure in jest? Believe me, my counsels were as grave as if they had been uttered by the Lord Chancellor in the most erudite of all his wigs. I advised no *feigning*, but a simple confession of *feeling* which I knew to exist."

"With a view to obtain some such concession in my turn?

—a concession which must inevitably insure the misery of both!"

"You seem bursting with magnanimity this morning; but you will not, at least, deny the fact of your being desperately in love?"

"Like a fool or a madman!—Eleanor is a sort of cousin of mine, although we have never met till lately;—and this connexion has advanced our intimacy with such miraculous facility, that I have seen her more in ten days than one sees of girls in general during a London-month. Knowing that my stay in England was so limited, I felt that I had a right to make it as happy as I could, without calculating that the misery of my residence on the Continent would thereby become increased a thousand fold."

"*Misery?* pho! pho!" exclaimed Stapylford. "Make the best of your way to Paris, and you will forget her in a month."

"You judge me, my dear Stapylford, by your own feelings."

"Not I, by Jupiter!—a week, or even a day, if passed according to my own good liking, would do the business for *me*."

"But unfortunately I am bound *not* to Paris, but to Leyden; where I fancy I should find the Waters of Oblivion more difficult of attainment."

"But I do not understand what takes you to-night to Oxford, a place which it costs me so much pains and hazard to keep away from. Is it your passion or your prudence—eh! Frederick?"

"Both!—I want to inquire of Charles Willingham whether his cousin is ever likely to be in possession of a shilling, before I presume to offer her my own younger brother's eighteen-pence;—I think it decent, in respect to both our families, that we should make up half-a-crown between us!"

"A considerable waste of time and trouble," observed Stapylford, arranging the *amadou* of his *cigarette*, which Tichborne had politely thrown open on the chiffonier. "Why don't you run away with her at once?"

"Run where—*in* what—*with* what?"

"I will lend you my travelling-carriage: and you can go to Gretna Green first, and Botham's, at Salt Hill, afterwards."

"And the King's Bench in the third place!—But who is to pay the cost of the expedition?—*I* have nothing but my dressing-box and a brace of greyhounds to raise money upon."

"My last loan is not exhausted, notwithstanding my last night's losses;—and five hundred are much at your service,"

said Stapylford listlessly. "I will give you a draft on my banker—and you can be off this evening."

"My dear Stapylford," exclaimed Lorimer, "you are so accustomed to find Tichborne and Co. dipping into your purse, as if it were their own, that you have forgotten scruples can even exist on such a subject. But Brook-street is not the Rue de la Paix, therefore *I* have no immediate excuse for the annihilation of memory which you predicted just now. —*I* cannot contrive to forget that I am a beggar—or a cadet —(synonymous terms, you know)—not for to-day or to-morrow, or till I came of age; but for the remainder of my hang-dog days. You must therefore excuse me from borrowing money which it will remain wholly out of my power to return at any future period—and——"

"I wish Tichborne were here to extend his ears, eyes, and lungs at such an extravagant declaration," observed Sir Comyne in a parenthesis.

—"And from running away with a pretty cousin of my own, who deserves a more honourable death than starvation on the Surry side of the bridges."

"As you please," said Stapylford. "But since you are so economically inclined, let me still recommend you to retain the Oxford journey as the last resource of your despair."

"I had resolved upon speaking to my father before I go abroad; and it will be necessary to provide myself with particulars previous to the explanation."

"A very rational precaution!—but you are going fifty superfluous miles in search of them. I can inform you, on the best authority, that your goddess is as portionless as you can desire. She has a little fairy of a sister living at Heddeston Court, with old Melchisedec Willingham, with whom I have been half in love myself ever since she has been out of leading-strings;—and the Dowager, my Monteagle grandame, has duly forewarned me every holidays, 'Montague—Montague—beware how how you entangle yourself with that child!—Fall in love with her cousin and welcome!—but Minnie will be a beggar to the end of her days."

"Minnie!" exclaimed Lorimer, starting from the sofa on which he had thrown himself in a very lover-like attitude. "Is *that* little girl the daughter of Lady Maria?—How strange that Eleanor should never mention her!—But now you remind me that, without referring to Melchisedec, as you obligingly denominate Charles Willingham's respected sire, I can gather all the particulars I wish to know from my friend Mary;—I will be off directly to Grosvenor-square."

"But you will find that armadillo, her sententious Ladyship, stationed in the drawing-room," said Stapylford.

"Oh, she will be busy reading the Book of Martyrs, or

the Pilgrim's Progress, and she never disturbs herself on my account. As Charles's friend, I am looked upon as the friend of the whole house. Or I will persuade Mary to come and walk with me in the square."

"You are a lucky dog to be trusted in *tête-à-tête* walks with young ladies," said Wallace, taking up his hat.

"Melchisedec knows that his daughter and her fifty thousand pounds are as safe with me as with her grandfather," said Lorimer.

"On her *mother's* side I believe she never *had* a grandfather," observed Stapylford. "But she is ugly enough to be safe anywhere, with anybody."

"No strictures on Mary Willingham;—she is the best creature breathing, and I love her like a sister," replied Frederick Lorimer.

"I have a great regard for Mary myself," said Stapylford, extending his finger in adieu, as they were leaving the room; "but I think *I* love her more like my grandmother. My compliments to her, Fred.—but you need not tell her so. And now I must go and see what Tichborne is doing."

"Stapylford is a fine fellow," observed Sir Comyne Wallace to Frederick Lorimer, as they sauntered arm-in-arm up Brook-street. "A gentleman in every feeling;—I wish he were in better hands than Tichborne's—who is ruining him at an immoderate pace, and without allowing the poor boy to take out his ruin's-worth of pleasure."

"Tichborne is an enigma to me," replied Lorimer. "Knowing him to be such another Squire Lackland as myself, I cannot make out how he gets on."

"He was an enigma to *me* five years ago; but now I know London better, and Tichborne only too well."

"His uncle, the Duke of Arlington, allows him two hundred a-year; on the strength of which he dresses better than any man in town—has the best equipage, the best valet:—belongs to all the clubs, and lives in the most exclusive society. Now, Lord Henry, his father—who is one of the respectable old pig-tail and Boodle school—has not a doit to bestow upon him, and has several daughters to marry—or to maintain."

"All very true! and as soon as Tichborne—who is a gross sensualist, and as unprincipled as a horse dealer—became aware of all his hereditary deficiencies and misfortunes, he struck out a new profession for himself, and became a spend-thrift-leech;—a middle-man between the boy-lords and the Israelites;—and it is astonishing how many estates he has already disabled into nursing-trim.—Tailors, jockeys, coach-makers, jewellers, and all the *avant couriers* of Banco Regis, are ready to kneel for his custom—that is for his *orders*;—and poor Stapylford and Co. become tacitly sacrificed to the compact."

"By Heavens! it is too bad!"

"True; but were they not in *his* hands, or some other of his illustrious confraternity, they would fall into those of sharpers, without even an "Honourable" prefaced to their names, and out of the pale of amenability to a hair-trigger;—fellows to whom a horse-whipping, more or less, would appear of no account, and who would cheat *ad infinitum* accordingly. Your Tichbornes, on the contrary, are within pistol retribution."

"I, you know, am too small game for such a kite to fly at," said Lorimer. "But I remember, last year, he joined me as I was sauntering down Bond-street to Hoby's, where he concluded I was about to give an order; and when he saw me take out my purse and ask for a stamp receipt, I shall never forget his air of consternation.—'My dear fellow, what in Heaven's name are you about?' said he, drawing me aside. 'For God's sake consider how scarce money is in London just now!'—As if I were making the bootmaker a gratuitous present!—But who is that beautiful woman bowing to you, Wallace?"

"In that green carriage?—Oh! a fair *parvenue!*"

"A Countess, by the emblazonments."

"I mean a *parvenue*-woman of fashion. Although she must be verging on forty, she only commenced her vocation last year; having been hitherto satisfied with provincial nonentitysm; coming to town for a change of nurses and a visit to the Exhibition; and returning to the lilacs and nightingales early in May."

"She is very handsome."

"Tolerably handsome, certainly;—but she disfigures herself by adopting every last ultra-extravagant mode; and renders herself odious by running after all the fine people, like a banker's wife."

"Her rank ought to place her above such a degradation."

"She adores *me* just now—because I am in Lady Robert Lorton's set, who will have nothing to say to her; and as to Lisborough—she would lay foot-cloths of velvet from her house to his, if he would only step over them to visit her. Poor Lady Radbourne passes three hours a day in ipditing little solicitation notes, trying to get here, and there, and everywhere, where she is not wanted. Good bye!—here we are at Sir Joseph's;—and Lady Monteagle's carriage, on the roll for departure, announces that the family are at home.—I wish you joy."

CHAPTER XIV.

Peste, soit la sincérité ! c'est un mauvais métier. Désormais j'y renonce, et je ne veux plus dire un mot de vrai.

MOLIERE.

The event was, however, no source of joy to Frederick; for, as the Monteagle equipage rumbled from the spot, an ethereal smile glanced upon him from its window, and a fair hand was so courteously kissed in his honour, that his heart-quake of the morning returned upon him more vehemently than ever; and by the time he was ushered by a gouty butler, the grandson of the departed Dickinson—to the door of Lady Willingham's formal drawing-room, the divine Eleanor, and her matchless charms of mind and person, had thoroughly repossessed themselves of his imagination. His countenance was sentimentalized by a thousand tender emotions—but he was spared the perils of a scrutiny;—for her Ladyship was thoroughly engrossed by worthy Mrs. Darnham, and another equally respectable village-neighbour, enveloped in an equally comprehensive woollen shawl; whose matronly details had been of so medical a character as to drive poor Mary to a distant table—where she was hanging over her palette and an exquisite group of flowers. Mr. Lorimer, after the usual compliments to the three destinies, who were so mysteriously laying their heads together in awful conclave, proceeded towards Miss Willingham's retreat, and seated himself by her side.

"What beautiful hyacinths, Mary!—they seem starting from the vellum; and how your group has advanced since I saw it last!"

"It is almost a fortnight since you were here," replied Mary, without raising her eyes from her drawing.

"Can it be possible!—I should scarcely have thought it a week!—indeed it appears only a day!—a dear, delightful, dreamy, midsum—er-day."

Mary's curiosity was now excited to lift her observation towards the countenance of the enthusiast; and in doing so she discovered that her own was somewhat pale, and that all its bloom appeared concentrated in the eyelids. Frederick instantly decided these effects to arise from the perfume of the flowers she was copying, and the arduous delicacy of her task. He had very little suspicion of his own share in the disfigurement;—he had very little idea how far his own attractions had influenced poor Mary's letter of refusal that morning to Sir William Wyndham; and the lecture of two hours and twenty minutes from her father, which had

followed its despatchal;—that since breakfast she had been compelled to listen to a recital (first and second edition, paternal and maternal) of the rentroll of the Wyndham Park estate; and to her cousin Eleanor's private recapitulation of all the tender nothings whispered to her by Frederick Lorimer in the course of Mrs. Grandison's ball and supper. Eleanor, it is true, had insisted quite as much on the general charms of the ball—upon the variety and fashion of her partners, and upon the Duke of Lisborough's renewed devotion to her sister Claudia;—Lorimer, and his attachment, had appeared to excite a very minor degree of interest among the pleasures of the evening; but she avowed herself conscious of its existence!—and to be loved by *him* and remain indifferent to the distinction, was a stretch of philosophy utterly beyond poor Mary's comprehension! It is miraculous that the bouquet of hyacinths was not utterly effaced by the flood of silent and bitter tears which had signalized Lady Monteagle's departure, and the cessation of Eleanor Willingham's confidences. But *he* was by her side again; and she could not feel *very* unhappy in Frederick's presence.

"Mary!" said he, "you must bestow that little painting upon me as a *bouquet d'adieu*.—I have only a week longer to remain among you; and when I am far away——"

Mary bent still closer over her work, and was guilty of several random touches.

—"When I am far away, it will serve to remind me of the few last happy days I spent in England!"

"Is Charles aware that so early a period is fixed for your departure?" said she in a low voice.

"Do not say *fixed*.—I cannot bear that odious word.—When I think of all the dangers of absence, Mary—when I consider the admiration with which the world will environ your lovely cousin, I can hardly believe that my courage will be equal to the effort of separation. So sweet a creature—so playfully, yet so harmlessly witty—so original, so *naïve*, so *enjouée* in her manners and ideas—so superior to the common-place routine of *Missy* girls one meets with in London!—Eleanor Willingham combines all the sprightly graces of a Parisian, with the modesty and solid understanding of a true-born Englishwoman. How happened it, Mary, that you never mentioned nor described her to me in all the walks and conversations we have had together at Heddeston?"

The gentle Mary saw nothing overcharged in Frederick Lorimer's description of her cousin; it was enough that *he* thought her an angel to sanctify the beatification in Mary's eyes; nor did she testily vindicate herself from the charge of "unlawfully concealing."—"You forget," said she mildly, "that we were mere children when we parted. Eleanor was always esteemed a very lovely and promising girl; but I re-

member once reading to you and my brother a passage from her letters, describing the Neapolitan carnival—which appeared to me a master-piece of lively elegance—and you both said so much of its tone of flippancy and levity, that I closed the leter and never mentioned my cousin's name to you again."

"English school-boys are such pudding-brained oafs!—Dear Eleanor!—what would I give to see one of her graceful effusions now!—I have learned to render her justice; and how delightful to think that my two most esteemed friends are her own nearest relatives—that if I ever have the happiness to call her *mine*, I should also attain the privilege of naming *you*, dearest Mary—you and Charles—my cousins!"

"Have you—have you any probable chance of such an accomplishment of your wishes?" faltered Mary Willingham, not daring to look up.

"That is exactly the question I am come to ask of yourself."

"Of *me*, Lorimer?"

"You are in Eleanor's confidence.—She regards you far more highly than any other member of her family,—she has too much discernment not to do you ample justice, dear Mary. Now tell me truly—has she not spoken to you of me?—And tell me truly again—have I any hope that she will deign to accept the devotion of my whole life—of my whole heart?"

Mary was conscious of a painful struggle between the agony of her feelings, and the determination to be perfectly candid;—and the heroism of honesty lent so fervid a flush to her cheek, and so intense a glance to her brow, that for a moment she appeared as lovely as the subject of their debate.

"She *has* spoken of you to me several times, Frederick;—with partiality—with preference—but nothing further. Had she said more, indeed, than that she thought you agreeable, gentlemanly, and well-informed, I should have considered myself bound, as a woman, to keep her secret. But although Eleanor has deposited *no* secret with me implying confidence—I have every reason to believe she has not formed any other attachment."

"Thank God!" exclaimed Frederick Lorimer fervently; and thank *you*, my dear kind Mary, for——"

He was not permitted to give a full term to his importunate gratitude; for Dickinson, junior, again throwing open the drawing-room door—announced "Lord Lorimer." Poor Lady Willingham, who saw in the arrival of the pompous and somewhat tedious peer, only an unwelcome interruption to her gratifying flannel-and-caudle colloquy with her village gossips, received him with cold and deliberate equanimity; but when in throwing his large gray cod-like eyes round the room, they finally rested upon Miss Willingham, blushing and trembling

—with his own son Frederick—*his younger son*—hanging over her chair—his Lordship puckered his leathern visage into a very peculiar smile, and drew himself up into an extra elevation of gratified pride. Certain projects, which had more than once glanced across his mind, became condensed into stability by the relative position of the parties; and in the course of his stately strut towards the table to inquire after Miss Mary's health, and interest himself in her avocation, it occurred to his parental foresight that his third son George might be more conveniently forwarded to Leyden; and his second son, Frederick, entered at Cambridge, with a view to orders and the reversionary chance of the living of Heddeston:—including, of course, the daughter of the patron, and her fifty thousand pounds.

Lord Lorimer was at all times a most pompously urbane man; deeply sensible of the mercy of Providence in making him a peer, and elevating him above the sordid uses of the vulgar; and smitten with a most overflowing sympathy with all those of his calling and degree. To be a nobleman was with him to be a vicegerent of Heaven; to be a baronet was at least something:—had he lived in the days when the heads of the traitor-lords were exposed on Temple-bar, it is probable that he would have dwindled into a nervous atrophy;—or had he attained years of discretion when Lord Ferrers was hanged, it is certain that he would have gone into mourning. The ulterior object of his present visit to Grosvenor-square was to offer his felicitations on the reported marriage between Claudia Willingham and his Grace of Lisborough—a catastrophe which he regarded as conferring honour upon her kindred even unto the remotest generation.

"I trust your Ladyship is persuaded," said Lord Lorimer, "of the deep interest with which Lady Lorimer and myself have watched the progress of an event so flattering to a family which has for many years honoured us with its friendship. Lady Maria Willingham is by birth my cousin, and I rejoice in her prosperity; but Sir Joseph and Lady Willingham are by choice my friends, and every incident involving their honour and happiness is important in my estimation."

Mary, who had deserted her drawing-table in order to assist entertaining her mother's guests, could not but consider this a singular mode of reasoning; but her Lady-mother was still less inclined to accept Lord Lorimer's absurd plausibilities. Thoroughly out of humour with love and matrimony on Sir William Wyndham's account, she could not bear any allusion to her niece's prospects, and would not hear of being congratulated.

"If your Lordship have any serious reason for believing Sir Joseph's niece to be engaged to the Duke of Lisborough,

I can only say that you are more fortunate in obtaining Lady Maria's confidence than *we* have been. She was here this morning, and I beg to say that not a word passed on the subject."

"Come—come, my dear Madam;—this is scarcely using me like a friend—like an *old* friend. It is now eight years—or faith—I believe nine—eh! Frederick?—since you taught that young gentleman of mine to prefer a home at Heddeston Court, to a home at Lorimer Hall. His own motives for the preference I leave him to account for to your Ladyship; but I am not ashamed to acknowledge that from the period in question—(yes! it was certainly nine years ago) until now—I have never ceased to regard the second parents of a beloved son as my own first friends!"

Lord Lorimer paused, as when expecting the cheers of the House; or of his own county meetings after a clap-trap;—and Lady Willingham, utterly at a loss to conjecture the motives of all this grandiloquent courtesy, filled up the pause with a bow of vague acknowledgment.

"I am aware that young ladies are extremely tenacious of having these little affairs prematurely discussed—eh! Miss Mary?—but although lovers—like ostriches—fancy that in hiding their heads they escape notice altogether, still suspicions *will* arise—the world *will* talk!—And why not?—What can be more honourable than the marriage estate, when affording creditable prospects of worldly prosperity, and blessed by the sanction of an approving family?"

Lady Willingham looked spitefully towards her daughter, to point out the confirmation contained in this impressive exordium to her own maternal homily of the morning. Poor Mary blushed at the implication;—she was sick of the very thoughts of Sir William Wyndham, and would gladly have dispensed with all matrimonial allusions for the remainder of her days.

Lord Lorimer, observant of these symptoms of general consciousness, and reading in them confirmation strong of his previous suspicions, now resumed his oration.

"On this point indeed—(and to you, my dear Lady Willingham, I need not scruple most unfashionably to acknowledge—on most others) Lady Lorimer and myself entertain a perfect unanimity of opinion. We are not only satisfied, but deeply anxious, that our children should settle early in life; an advantage to their permanent prospects which we are even willing to secure by personal sacrifices, and by——"

"My dear father!" exclaimed Frederick Lorimer, unable to repress his feelings of exultation on this most new and unexpected announcement. "My dear Sir!—This kindness adds a thousand-fold to all your former obligations towards my mother and yourself."

Lord Lorimer tried to muster a little emotion, and to appear properly affected, for he suspected that an explanation was coming; but Lady Willingham, who felt that her own hearth-rug and the presence of Mesdames Darnham and Dodderwell formed a very singular scene for the display of the domestic sensibilities of a father and son so remotely connected with the family as Lord Lorimer and Frederick, began to twitch her shawl, and evince divers symptoms of impatience. She was herself a very undemonstrative woman, and regarded a *scene* of any kind as superfluous and impertinent. But she became still more vexed and still more indignant when, on glancing a second time towards Mary, she perceived that her blushes had given place to a death-like paleness, and that the poor girl could scarcely keep her seat. Miss Willingham had been harassed during five successive hours with every variety of trial that could assail a delicate mind and feeling heart; and even *her* moral courage—great as it was—could no longer maintain her through the struggle.

"You are ill, dear Mary," said Mr. Lorimer, going towards her. "Lady Willingham, will you give me leave to open a window?—the heat of the weather—the flowers—the ——"

"I believe, Frederick, we had better retire," said Lord Lorimer, looking significantly towards the mother of his future daughter-in-law. "A little crisis of this description is better consigned to female management."

Lady Willingham, wishing both him and his son at Lorimer Hall, or any other remote point of the United Kingdom, bade them a hasty and sullen good-by; and when they arrived together at the foot of the stairs, Lord Lorimer courteously invited his son to accompany him in his low elderly phaeton as far as the House of Commons; where the hopeful head of the family was to plead the cause of his constituents, in an explosion of preconcerted verbosity, extremely well calculated to pair off the house into the respectful silence of solitude.

"My dear father," exclaimed Frederick, as they rounded the corner of Charles-street, "how shall I express my gratitude for what has fallen from your lips this morning; or my surprise that you should have so quickly penetrated my sentiments!"

"Old heads, Fred.!—old heads—"

—"Are not often connected, Sir, with so much disinterested warmth of heart. I had apprehended that nothing would be more displeasing to you than the prospect of my marriage so early in life."

"The respectability of the Willingham family, and the rare merits of the young lady you have selected, form a strong argument in your favour."

"In point of fortune, however, my dear father—"

"Frederick! I never was esteemed a mercenary man;—fortune is, in my opinion, a very secondary consideration, when compared with birth and moral character. Of course, I shall immediately relinquish my Leyden plan; you must get through the university with as little delay as possible;—and I have no doubt, Sir Joseph will set everything straight by presenting you to the living of Heddeston."

"I wish I had any reason to hope, Sir, that this would be the case; but I suspect that very little real cordiality exists between him and Lady Maria."

"*Lady Maria!*—and why should he consult that silly woman about his church preferment? Let her content herself with marrying her own vain, frivolous, fine-lady daughters, without interfering in the disposal of his."

Mr. Lorimer was thoroughly mystified; but it was only for a moment. He scarcely dared, however, stammer forth his preface to an explanation.

"I fear, my Lord, some fatal misunderstanding exists between us on this subject."

"I think not, Fred.," replied his Lordship, with a self-complacent smile, clumsily touching his wheeler on the flank. "I am not much in the habit of being mistaken in my personal conjectures. I have long seen that you were desperately in love."

"I do not deny it, Sir."

"With my respectable friend, Mr. Joseph Willingham's amiable daughter."

"With *Mary* Willingham, my Lord!—Good God!—How unfortunate!—What can have possessed you with such a mistaken—such a fatal idea?"

"*Who* then, Mr. Frederick Lorimer, if I may presume to ask—who is the *real* object honoured by your flattering preference?" said his Lordship, with dawning consciousness.

"My dear father—pray excuse me from disclosing her name just now."

"Upon my word, Sir!—"

"Yet what have I to hope from delay?—You assure me that fortune is a minor consideration:—that birth—that virtue—"

"Damn it, Sir! speak out—what is the girl's name?—who the devil is she?"

"Lady Maria Willingham's second daughter," replied Frederick, in accents of despair.

"*Eleanor Willingham!!*" shouted Lord Lorimer, in a tone of indignation; "a beggar, by all that is horrible."

CHAPTER XV.

I sometimes almost think that eyes have ears;
This much is sure—that *out* of earshot, things
Are somehow echoed to the pretty dears,
Of which I can't tell whence their knowledge springs.

BYRON.

About ten days after this afflicting explanation, Mary Willingham chanced to find herself at a party at Lady Dynevour's, interpolated into a group composed of the Miss Lorimers and two or three "young men about town," upon whom they were in the habit of bestowing the exuberance of their colloquial animation, after the fashion conventionally denominated "flirting." They were two good-humoured, lively girls; but so ill-trained (according to Lady Maria Willingham's notion of education), as to distinguish very slightly between the "good matches" and the "detrimentals;"—and they were accordingly surrounded, on most occasions, by young ensigns in the Guards, Foreign-office and Treasury honourables, scarcely yet fledged into official importance, and other equally unavailable representatives of the masculine sex;—good at most for a *galopade*, or a mazurka—to carry chairs in Kensington Gardens, or to escort a fidgety horse through the exciting equestrian mob of the Parks.

"What has become of Frederick?" inquired Sir Comyne Wallace of Gertrude Lorimer. "I have been down to my uncle, in Shropshire, for a week, to see what has been done towards expediting him into an apoplexy; and I have not had a glimpse of Lorimer since my return."

"Of Frederick?—Have you heard nothing of his departure?—Why, he has been gone so long, that we have almost forgotten him! By this time poor Fred. is probably wandering on the banks of the Elbe, with a Meerschaum in his mouth, and the Sorrows of Werter in his bosom. Finding that he was stark mad with love and despair, my father was apprehensive that the police reports of the Morning Herald would acquaint us some day with the melancholy circumstance of his having taken the altitude of the central arch of Westminster Bridge; so my poor brother's trunks were packed *up*, and his disconsolate self *off*, before he had time for remonstrance."

"So much the better for him," observed Sir Comyne; "even though he should still venture on a personal inspection of the waters of the Elbe. Immediate drowning is preferable to hanging next season; which would have been poor Frederick's

inevitable destiny. Lorimer is far too sensitively honourrable a fellow to put up with a giddy flirting wife."

"Oh! fie—Sir Comyne!" interrupted Emily Lorimer, a young lady who always dealt in the ultrissimo of superlative. "I assure you the object of Frederick's attachment is the most delightful girl in London!—so accomplished, so entertaining!—in point of fashion there is nothing like her!—In short we all adore her; and if there had been any fortune on *her* side, or had my eldest brother been the lover instead of Fred. no possible objection could have been formed to the match. But Pa thought that a *ménage sans six sous*, would not prove *sans souci*; and therefore refused his consent!"

Having applauded this piece of obsolete wit, Sir Comyne turned for further explanation of the conclusion of poor Frederick Lorimer's precipitate love affair, to Mr. Ducie; who had been parrying, in the interval, the attack of the fair Gertrude, on his lazy avoidance of balls, and his steady appearance at all the humdrum dowager-parties, such as those of Lady Dynevour.

"I assure you," said he, "I ground my public and social conduct upon the strictest principles—*of selfishness!* Having the constitutional misfortune to dance like an Otaheitan, I am always unwelcome as a partner;—while at these dull parties, which so few young men condescend to patronize, I increase in value cent. per cent. I find no lady here creeping away into another room to avoid my approach, as she would at Devonshire House, or any other *Académie Royale de danse et de musique*;—among a tribe of old members, country baronets, and whist-playing mummies of the middle ages, I become quite a "Triton of the minnows."

Gertrude Lorimer, like his Majesty's lower House of Parliament, was somewhat impatient of long speeches of explanation; and had already turned her attention towards some lighter flirt—some one better inclined to garnish his *because* with a few personal compliments towards herself;—and Sir Comyne Wallace seized on the opportunity to draw Ducie aside for further interrogation. The pressure of the crowd still, however, prevented their escape beyond reach of the attentive Mary's delicate auricular organization.

"What is all this history about, Lorimer?—The last time we both supped with you at the Travellers, he appeared enchanted with his prospects."

"Unfortunately his exultation proved premature, and realized the definition of an English summer, 'three fine days and a thunder-storm.'"

"And what brought about the final explosion!"

"The overcharged electricity of the paternal atmosphere."

"A truce to metaphors, 'an thou lovest me.'"

"Well, then, in the simplest possible English—a thing *you* seldom condescend to use—Frederick pleaded guilty of flagrant love and folly, in the course of one of his father's pompous cross-examinations;—in consequence of which plea, Lord Lorimer condemned him, on his own evidence, to transportation for three years to some German university."

"His original sentence, if I remember. But tell me! did the unhappy convict resign himself to the hulks, without any further attempt to secure a companion for his miseries?—Surely there was some notion of an elopement?"

"So Lorimer flattered himself; and an old uncle, who hoards his guineas among his chalk hills in Bedfordshire, having presented him with a few hundreds towards the purchase of his Leyden Classics, he tried to persuade the fair Eleanor to come and live with him on *sauerkraut* and *kalbsbraten*, upon an allowance of five hundred a-year."

"A goodly prospect."

"I watched them both during supper one night at Lisborough House, while he was presenting these savoury images to her mind.—I wish you could have beheld her countenance and his."

"I imagine that Miss Willingham's overflowed with indignation at such a barbarous proposal."

"On the contrary!—the indignation was all on poor Fred.'s side of the question. As to the fair Eleanor, she did nothing but laugh;—and seeing Lorimer's handsome face vary from the tender to the sublime—from the sublime to the persuasive—from the persuasive to the astonished—from the astonished to the indignant—and from the indignant to the magnanimously disdainful—I was quite placable when he woke me out of my beauty-sleep at nine o'clock the following morning to make his confessions, and explanations, and adieus."

"And were they tremendously lacrymose?"

"By no means; Lorimer was as indignant as Achilles—rallied at the sex in general—and Miss Eleanor in particular;—reviled a Parisian education as the cause of his wo—and——"

"But did he *explain* the mystery?"

"There was no mystery in the case?—'Tis an old tale, and often told!'—Miss Willingham begged to assure him that she thought him a very agreeable, gentlemanly personage—to dance with; but that neither he, nor love, nor matrimony, had ever for a single moment occupied her serious thoughts. She even recommended him, as a friend, to dismiss, on all future occasions, the idea of a love-match from his mind; as being the poorest bubble that ever floated in the chaos of a human understanding;—made him a low courtesy—wished him a pleasant journey, and left him planted, while *she* went

off to dance with some booby Baronet—a certain Sir William Wyndham, to the best of my remembrance."

"And thus ended poor Lorimer's eternal passion of a month's duration!—Poor fellow!—He is too single-hearted and excellent, himself, to be trusted unarmed among the herd of worldly, scheming, artful girls, with whom you and I, Ducie, may peril our hands and hearts without dread of defeat.—Poor Lorimer!—I fear he has too much feeling not to suffer deeply from this disappointment."

"*I* do not *fear* it," observed Mr. Ducie, moving away. "I sincerely hope, on the contrary, that he has had a bilious fever, and will have a slow recovery; for it is a lesson that will be useful to him as long as he lives."

Poor Mary trusted she did not smile too evidently during the continuance of this gratifying colloquy. It was the first regular explanation of the affair that had yet reached her. Frederick had not quitted England without despatching a few words of agonized farewell to "the sister of his dearest friend;" but the mysterious billet had unfortunately chanced to fall into the hands of Lady Willingham, who, referring its inexplicative tenderness personally to her daughter—and her daughter's refusal of Sir William Wyndham to Mr. Lorimer's incoherent eloquence—acted as many other prudent mammas would have done. In the absence of a fire, she tore both note and envelop into delicate strips; rolled them into slender *allumetts;* and deposited the inflammable collection in the taper-stand of her own dressing-room for immediate use.

Lord Lorimer, meanwhile, had studiously cautioned his gentle wife and giddy daughters against any betrayal of "that ass Frederick's cursed folly, to the family of his inestimable friend, Sir Joseph Willingham;"—and Eleanor and Claudia were so thoroughly intent upon appropriating the proprietor of Wyndham Park as an accessory to the Duke of Lisborough—and so much in terror of making this little piece of domestic treachery manifest to their cousin—that they exerted all their ingenuity to avoid her visits and mistime their own. And thus Mary had endured ten very uneasy days—ten restless nights; and had been in far greater danger of the bilious fever and the slow recovery advocated by Mr. Ducie, than the roving Frederick himself. She had occasionally met her cousins at evening parties since his departure; *his* name, of course, had never passed the lips of either; but she had read upon Eleanor's triumphant brow, and in her sparkling eyes, confirmation strong of all her own secret apprehensions. She was convinced that nothing but the consciousness of plighted love, and an auspicious, though secret engagement, could be the origin of her visible joy and self-content; and as a future Mrs. Frederick Lorimer—living on

love and law in lodgings within the narrow limits of Boswell Court—she contemplated her cousin prospectively, as the happiest and most enviable of human beings.

Nor was the delight with which she listened to a recapitulation of Eleanor's base and heartless desertion of poor Frederick, unmixed with commiseration for himself, and indignation against the jilt. But Mary Willingham, with all her virtues, was but human after all. She was quickly consoled—quickly recovered her serenity of mind; nay! so deeply did she at length exult that her dear brother's bosom friend should have escaped the snares of a coquette, and the dangers of a heartless and worldly-minded companion for life, that, during Mr. Ducie's explanation, her usually pale cheek became flushed with the deepest crimson, and her eyes sparkled with so brilliant an air of triumph, that many persons present pronounced Mary Willingham that evening to be as handsome as either of her beautiful cousins; and more than one of the Misses Lorimers' suite of detrimentals requested to be favoured with a presentation to their lovely friend.

But Mary had not the smallest genius for being a beauty. She preferred at all times being approved to being admired; and now that Frederick was gone—whose fickle taste might have been in some measure directed by the finger-post of the world's adoration—she was perfectly contented to remain unnoticed in the shade. She had long been aware of the insufficiency of her charms to attract and retain those affections in which alone she wished to claim a part;—and her recent apprehensions having now subsided, she was satisfied to congratulate herself on Mr. Lorimer's escape from a giddy coquettish wife, without indulging in any vain ambition of conquests for herself.

"Only conceive! dearest Mary," exclaimed Gertrude Lorimer, turning suddenly towards her, "here is Lady Dynevour quietly assembling us to yawn at each other, and old Lady Monteagle fighting over the chances of the odd trick;—and neither of them have the least idea of poor Lady Stapylford's disasters."

"Lady Stapylford!—what has occurred to her?"

"To *her*, nothing; but that wild boy, Montagu, Mr. Willingham's and Frederick's precious *protégée*, has been expelled from Oxford;—and Lord Stapylford, who has always been kept in the dark with regard to his son's excesses, has been so greatly shocked by this very unexpected exposure, that he is suffering from an attack of spasmodic gout, and his life is despaired of."

"I fear Mr. Stapylford is preparing a long series of misfortunes for himself and his parents," said Mary, thoughtfully. But at that moment Lord Lorimer and General de Vesci—who had been nailed to the whist-table all the even-

ing—approached the young ladies. His Lordship was, as usual, most assiduous to his friend Sir Joseph's amiable daughter; a courtesy which Mary was wholly at a loss to interpret. Lord Lorimer, indeed, was an enigma to her comprehension;—she knew not how to reconcile the tale she had recently heard respecting his opposition to Frederick's union with her cousin Eleanor, and the exhibition of tender sensibility she had herself witnessed, and referred at the time to his unqualified approval of the match. She knew him to be a very courteous and courtly man in general;—fond of as much idle popularity as can be won by affable bows and universal civility;—and had she previously doubted the fact, her opinion would have been confirmed, in the present instance, by his demeanour towards the equally urbane General, respecting their common relative—Lady Maria Willingham.

"I do not see your charming nieces here to-night, General de Vesci. My friend and kinswoman, Lady Maria, is one of those prudent mothers who are wise enough to economize on the beauty of their offspring. Mere homely girls may run from party to party, and fly from ball to ball;—their absence or their presence remains equally unnoticed. But Lady Maria is well aware that Miss Claudia and Miss Eleanor are not to be lightly passed over; nobody could remain in doubt whether the Miss Willinghams were seen to grace such and such a *fête*. Their mother does well not to render their appearance a too general favour."

"I should have thought," replied the General, with a government-house bow, and quite mistaking his meaning, "that any society graced by your Lordship's daughters, would have done honour to my nieces. I detest finery and affectation; and Lady Maria is, in fact, under serious obligations to Lady Monteagle—such as ought not to have permitted her to dispense with an appearance at Lady Dynevour's party."

"I assure you, General de Vesci," good-naturedly interrupted Mary Willingham, "that Lady Maria and her daughters formed the chief ornaments of the room, while you were engaged at whist in the early part of the evening. They were accompanied by Sir William Wyndnam; and were obliged to go away to Lady Robert Lorton's."

"To Lady Robert Lorton's!" ejaculated the General, secretly delighted by this announcement. "Now that is the very thing of which I complain.—What attraction ought a new friend, or rather a new acquaintance, such as Lady Robert Lorton, to offer in competition with the claims of an old country neighbour?"

"I had understood that there existed a family relationship between the houses of Lorton and De Vesci."

The General had now gained his point. "Certainly, my

Lord! certainly;—James, the thirteenth Duke, and seventeenth Earl of Lisborough, being son to Lord Adophus Lorton, by Mildred, the daughter of John, fourth Earl of Chesterville, whose mother was a De Vesci!"

This valuble intelligence being partly addressed to Mary, she thought it polite to acknowledge its importance by a grateful bow; much marvelling at the same time that any human memory could be so ill furnished, as to find lumber-room for such a tissue of obsolete trash. Not so Lord Lorimer; *he* was quite a curiosity-hunter of minor incidents—loved an Anno Domini to his very heart—could date all the existent Peerage to a month and a day; and entertained so singular a partiality for the perusal of proper names, that he always employed the half hour preceding a procrastinated dinner, in reading the Red Book, or the Court Guide; nor did he ever pass over the weekly Morning Post list of Lady Sefton's or Lady Salisbury's assemblies—especially the latter, which generally included himself and family.

"Under these circumstances, General, we will not blame the young ladies for seeking a society at once so distinguished and so fascinating as that of Lady Robert Lorton. Besides—if public and newspaper report is to be credited—which, by the way, requires in most modern instances an extraordinary stretch of credulity—an alliance in the present generation is likely to renew the earlier consanguinities of the respective ancestors of the De Vesci's and the Lortons. Permit me, my dear Sir, to offer you my felicitations on an event so gratifying to every common relative of Miss Claudia Willingham and Lady Maria."

The General affected, in reply, that peculiar smile of conscious unconsciousness with which diplomatists attempt to conceal their total want of information on any subject of importance. "The Duke of Lisborough was to have met my niece and her daughters at a dinner at my house on Thursday last," said he, evasively, omitting to state that the "*was* to have met" consisted simply in an invitation and a refusal. "But his Grace was so eager concerning his friend Lord Barringhurst's amendment in the House of Lords, that we were forced to resign the pleasure of his company."

"My cousin, Claudia, and Lady Barringhurst, have recently become extremely intimate," observed Mary.

"Aha!" said the delighted General, "*that* indeed explains the business. Mrs. De Vesci's relatives, Sir Robert, Sir Thomas, Sir Richard, and Sir Hew Westland, suggested some such motive for his Grace's absence. Men of the world, like the Westlands, are always familiar with those little rumours of society."

Lord Lorimer, who despised the whole tribe of Westlands with all the force of his aristocratic hauteur, regarding them

as the mere counterocracy of city honours, bowed with an air of lofty superiority. He was quite aware that such people as the Westlands give excellent dinners, maintain showy equipages, and purchase country-seats well thinned of their timber by some former spendthrift proprietor;—but with respect to their acquaintance with the *on dits* of society—saving such frothy scum as floats on the surface of the clubs—his Lordship entertained an opinion of his own.

"I hope Mrs. De Vesci is well?" interposed Mary Willingham, embarrassed by the pause occasioned by Lord Lorimer's deliberate sneer. "I do not see her here to-night?"

"Mrs. De Vesci has unfortunately so long accustomed herself to the luxurious habits of a more enervating climate, that she finds it difficult to rouse herself after dinner sufficiently for the habits of general society. On the present occasion, she had wholly overlooked the date of Lady Dynevour's obliging invitation."

"Stupid old dormouse!" thought Lord Lorimer: but he only observed aloud, but aside to Mary, "Ah! my dear Miss Willingham! it is not every lady of any age who emulates *your* admirable habits of domestic activity. My son Frederick has made me intimately acquainted with the excellent customs of Heddeston Court;—they made a deeper impression on his young mind than you are probably aware of. Poor Fred. was very much to be pitied in leaving England at the present crisis;—let me trust, however, that he will not be wholly forgotten during his absence. I am anxious to persuade my friends, Sir Joseph and Lady Willingham, to visit Lorimer Park in the course of the summer, in order that my girls may find before their eyes a model of all that is graceful and praiseworthy in their own sex. I am anxious that the Miss Lorimers should continue to cultivate the friendship which you have hitherto condescended to bestow on their brother."

Mary, touched and embarrassed beyond her own control, blushed and bowed, and bowed and blushed again. She could not at all understand the drift of Lord Lorimer's politeness; but she had reason to believe that its exuberance was sufficiently hypocritical; and had he not been Frederick's father, it is probable that she would have descended Lady Dynevour's staircase with the impression of having been engaged in conversation with a very contemptible personage.

CHAPTER XVI.

The lovely oligarchs of our gynocracy!
You may see such at all the balls and dinners,
Among the proudest of our aristocracy;
So gentle, charming, charitable, chaste—
And all by having tact as well as taste.

BYRON.

Is it wonderful that the young and the gay and the brilliant, should fly from the society of this common-place and twaddling description to a coterie such as that of Lady Robert Lorton?—from whist to *écarté*—from quadrilles to the mazurka—from turbans and India shawls to *coëffures à la Courlande*, and *robes à la Marie Mignot*—from twice and thrice-told tales to the *bon-mots* of Lord Granville, or the original anecdotes of Mr. Tichborne?—from the ceremonious formality of Dowagers, male and female, to the luxurious and high-bred ease of a Lady Barringhurst and a Lady Rachel Verney?

The Willinghams, who were estimated, in old Lady Monteagle's matter-of-fact and provincial set, only at the rate of their fifteen hundred per annum, were welcomed into the little diamond *bouquet* in Arlington-street with the eagerness befitting their united powers of enhancing its brilliancy. Lady Barbara Desmond paused in the midst of her flirtation with Lord Cosmo Somerset, to blow a kiss to the two lovely girls, whom she might naturally have regarded as dangerous rivals. Sir George Wolryche—who had been guarding a little treasure of Parisian scandal to do honour to their arrival—accompanied them towards Lady Robert's own especial divan; Lady Barringhurst extended her hand to Lady Maria with her usual fascinating air of gentle friendliness, while Henry Mulgrave attempted to attract her daughters towards the music-room, where Lady Desmond, and several other amateurs, were attempting the score of a new opera of Spontini's, which had just arrived from Berlin among some equally important diplomatic despatches. The party was not large: but it consisted of persons on such excellent terms with each other, that every one was occupied, and no one listless. *Chacun y trouvait sa chacune*, and consequently no one was missed or wanted. One lady, indeed, gazed vainly and discontentedly around her for an absent knight;—but alas! *he* was no Paladin of hers—as was proved by the sequel.

Eleanor Willingham, who had obtained permission from her dear friend, Lady Robert, to bring with her the stupid

Sir William Wyndham—on whom she was now intent to try the whole battery of her charms—drew towards her Ladyship's little colloquial knot, to thank her for the favour; which was in fact one of no small account from a person so exclusively exclusive in her circle of acquaintance. But as Eleanor accepted the seat vacated for her by Lord Grandville, it appeared to her discriminating ear and eye that her arrival had interrupted some subject of previous discussion. This suspicion, however, neither intimidated nor perplexed her mind. Lady Robert Lorton was a person of such irreproachable good faith, that those *really* honoured by her friendship felt their interests and their characters to be safe in her hands. No envy, no jealousy, no malice ever tempted her to treachery; and Eleanor Willingham was satisfied that nothing more offensive than some unpleasing piece of intelligence was thus guarded from her participation.

"Only imagine, dear Eleanor, the folly of that restless Lady Radbourne," exclaimed Lady Robert Lorton, changing the subject of conversation by a somewhat syncopical transition. "You know how laboriously she has been attempting to force the condescension of her acquaintance upon me. Last year, at Worthing, she sent me a long explanatory bill to the hotel, which poisoned all its inmates with *frangipane*, imploring me to carry off my sweet little angels to Hastings or Brighton without delay, or that the measles would save me all further trouble of their removal.—'As a mother herself, she thought it her duty to inform me that she had ascertained beyond a doubt, that Nos. 3, 7, and 19, in Wellington-buildings (where my Ladyship's lodgings were said to be engaged), had been recently affected with measles in their several nurseries.'"

"How very friendly!—how very amiable!" involuntarily exclaimed the matter-of-fact Sir William Wyndham.

Eleanor blushed for the density of her lover; and Lady Robert turned to examine her unsophisticated guest with an air of profound amazement, highly amusing to Lord Grandville.

"Of course you were all gratitude for an attention so free from officiousness," said he, sarcastically, "and returned a visiting ticket with your answer to the little note scented with frangipane."

"You know me better!" replied Lady Robert, laughing. "Besides, a card bearing written evidence of its emanation from the infected locality of Wellington-buildings, would have driven poor Lady Radbourne's maternal sensibilities to distraction. No!—I braved the peril of the measles, and the far greater peril of making her acquaintance—and for my valour's sake escaped both; although my donkey-cart ran against her barouche and four on all the roads; and although

she used to toady my Italian greyhound whenever she met me on the sands. She even took the liberty of giving my two poor boys an indigestion, by stuffing them with indiscriminate pine-apple ice in a provincial confectioner's shop in the dog-days."

"I believe the shops at Worthing are reckoned very good," again judiciously interposed the Kentish Baronet.

"Nothing but a Medea would condemn her offspring to promiscuous confectionary in this land of chemical substitutes," said Lord Grandville, gravely. "Muriatic acid and corrosive sublimate form the staple material of our *pralines* and *gimblettes*."

The Baronet was stultified; for the gimblets of his own acquaintance were formed of wood and metal, and pretended to no qualities beyond those of acupuncture.

"And what is Lady Radbourne's new manœuvre?" inquired Eleanor. "Has she advanced openly—or have you discovered her lurking in ambuscade?"

"This morning Rosalie woke me out of a delicious dream, to present me with a billet upon blue satin paper, covered all over with vignettes. I started from the horrid spectacle as if it had been an implement of destruction!—but concluding it an application for some of Lord Robert's Welsh constituents for one of my vouchers for the next charity-ball, or perhaps an answer to my advertisement for a nursery governess, I bade Rosalie open, and read it to me."

"*Apparement c'est quelque galanterie anonyme qui s'addresse à Miladi*," said poor Rosalie, forgetting that she is no longer an inhabitant of the *Chaussée d'Antin*. "*Car le billet est accompagné d'un Boa magnifique; et cependant je ne trouve nulle part le mot de l'enigme.*

"Accompanied by a Boa—why surely Lady Radbourne never dreamed of presenting you with a *cadeau*, by way of bribing you to know her?"

"Not quite so bad—but very nearly! The billet explained to me that poor Lady Radbourne, who seems to be short sighted as well as ill-bred, had unfortunately brought away this Boa in mistake for her own from Mrs. Grandison's ball; and instead of returning it to the groom of the chambers, as any one else would have done, it appears that she has been exhibiting it to all her morning visitors, for the chance of having it owned—or more probably for the advantage of severally acquainting them that she had been included within the ring-fence enclosing Mrs. Grandison's semi-savage horde."

"So that having attempted to convict every other human being in London of feloniously appropriating her property, she has at length been driven, as a last resource, to fix her suspicions on Lady Robert Lorton."

"Never venture to anticipate the *bonne bouche* of such a

narrative as mine!—You are still wide of the mark. She assures me, in the blue satin billet, that one and all of these odious morning visitors of hers have conspired to assert that that nothing so beautiful, so elegant, so valuable, and so distinguished as the unlucky Boa thus peremptorily forced into her possession, was ever seen within the bills of mortality, saving upon my Ladyship's shoulders; and Lady Radbourne furthermore declares, that she has deprived herself of rest and food, in order to accelerate its restoration to its rightful owner."

"Lady Radbourne appears to be blessed with the gift of circumlocution."

"Endowed with the supereminence of human folly!" exclaimed Lady Robert. "I had the tact to ascertain, however, by a shop ticket still clinging to the extreme extremity of the tail, that the Boa had been purchased of Maradan;—and of Maradan I learned, without evasion, that it was bought in as a bargain by Lady Radbourne herself only yesterday morning; plainly proving, by these means, that this would-be fine lady considered my acquaintance worthy purchase by the sum total of fifteen guineas and a—falsehood."

"I should rather imagine," observed Lord Grandville, "from *such* a standard of valuation, that poor Lady Radbourne is the strictest economist in London."

"And how did you evade this notable springe?" inquired Eleanor.

"So bold a measure of impertinent ill-breeding demanded very little consideration on my part—so I sent her back her purchase by the hands of Lord Robert's Irish groom, who is capable of communicating the perfume of the stables to every object he touches, or even looks upon."

"Without one little line in answer to the *billet à vignettes*?"

"With Lady Robert Lorton's compliments and assurances that she has not worn such a thing as a Boa for several years past."

"Poor Lady Radbourne!—what a grievous pity that she could not be

Content to dwell in decencies for ever,

in the rural shades of her beautiful park!—She has not the smallest talent for the profession of fine ladyism; and her laborious and ineffectual efforts to display the barest shoulders in the best society in London, only tend to render her ridiculous. If not exactly destined to 'chronicle small beer,' she is at least admirably adapted to chronicle *iced* claret and *hot* sauterne for the suppers of her provincial balls. And she will

contrive to distinguish herself through life by the breaches of the peace of fashion."

"I trust she may learn to distinguish herself by nothing worse," observed Lord Grandville. "A woman so covetously greedy of the follies of the day may, perhaps, ultimately come day or other in a less blameless path to notoriety."

"We have no right to anticipate evil!" said Lady Robert, with a gesture of languid impatience. "Let us laugh at Lady Radbourne—for her labours demand some such sort of recompense. But she is a good mother, and, as far as I know, a good wife and a good woman; and may therefore claim exemption from the tax of personal scandal."

"Dearest Lady Robert!" exclaimed Henry Mulgrave, who had approached unperceived in the course of the Radbourne anecdote, "be merciful, and dissolve the spell by which you have enchanted Miss Eleanor Willingham to your side. We cannot get on in the music-room without her baritone to perfect the most exquisite quintette that ever breathed its harmonies on mortal ears!—Lady Desmond has been singing for *two* this half-hour past; but her powers are limited to this bi-vocal exertion.—Have I your sanction to convey Miss Willingham as a prisoner through yonder 'traitor's gate?'"

"Go, love!" said Lady Robert. "I will allow twenty minutes for your bright genius to blunder on towards perfection; and when I consider that your quintette has had time to become endurable to ears polite, I will follow you to the music-room, and enact audience with all fitting forbearance and partiality."

Eleanor rose to accompany Mr. Mulgrave. "I do not think your sister is well," whispered he, as the door-way of the music-room brought them for a moment into nearer contact. "Take no notice of my warning, but pray devote your kind attention to her support."

Eleanor Willingham laughed at this solemn admonition. "I never saw Claudia in better health, or higher spirits," said she. "We have been riding together all the morning—the heat was oppressive, and she may have possibly over fatigued herself."

Henry Mulgrave shook his head with an incredulous smile. "*I* tell you that she is ill," he replied; "and time, I fear, will accredit my medical skill."

On reaching the piano-forte, Eleanor Willingham—however astonished, however reluctant—was secretly obliged to admit the reasonableness of the officious Mulgrave's prognostications. Claudia, who had left her side scarcely half an hour before—calm with the even temperature of a heart at ease, and beautiful both from nature and from the gratifying consciousness of general admiration—had acquired, during her

sister's absence, an air of feverish anguish, such as rarely disfigures a brow at once so lovely and so young. She had been singing;—she was still smiling and talking!—but Eleanor saw in a moment that something was terribly wrong.

Approaching her sister with affected unconcern, and gradually edging her way through the flirtation of Lord Cosmo and Lady Barbara, and the less overt but equally intimate intercommunication between Mr. Tichborne, and Lady Barringhurst, Eleanor whispered a few words of eager inquiry. "Dearest Claudia! what has happened?"

"*Happened?*—what *should* happen?—unless a grievous massacre committed by our united inexperience upon the beauties of this lovely new opera!" said she aloud.

"Claudia—Claudia! this to *me*?—You are agitated beyond the power of control or disguise."

"Hush! hush!—for worlds do not let these people suspect for a moment that my calmness is assumed!"

"You distract me by this mystery."

"Once more let me implore you to forbear! This is no scene, and no moment for explanations.—Lady Desmond! my sister is petitioning for leave to divide your labours;—Mr. Mulgrave, Eleanor is eager to attempt the intricacies of the tenor part, which ought to do justice to your beautiful bass."

Eleanor, shocked to perceive by how violent an effort her sister attempted to subdue the tumult of her feelings, and completely in the dark as to the origin of their excitement, could scarcely command her voice to acquit herself creditably of her part in the concert;—and although Sir William Wyndham, who had assiduously followed her into the music-room, repeatedly assured her that her voice was much higher, and lower, and louder than that of the celebrated Miss Tomkins, of Drury-lane Theatre, she was fully aware that she had been heard to great disadvantage among the performers. Affecting an anxiety to examine the score of the new opera, she hung over the music-book with a view to conceal her tremour and perplexity; and while apparently engrossed by the interest of its minims and crotchets—its *adagios* and *animatos*—she contrived to overhear the broken fragments of a conversation between Sir George Wolryche and Sir Comyne Wallace—who had just arrived from Lady Dynevour's party—which served in some measure to unravel the root of the mystery.

"But what could they expect of such a silly boy as Vallerhurst?" observed Sir Comyne. "He was sent abroad by his family to wean him from such drunken schoolboy follies as breaking lamps—charging the watch—overturning mail-coaches—and getting into promiscuous quarrels at Stevens's. Did they expect that he would improve his classical scholar-

ship by a perusal of all the *cartes* of all the *cafés* in Paris?—or his judgment by pelting sugarplums at the Carnival?"

"I do not suppose they cared much either for his wit or his wisdom. He is come of a race whose excesses generally consign them to the family-vault before they attain the age of twenty-five; and his guardians were accordingly anxious that Vallerhurst should marry as early as possible, and bequeath an heir to so precarious a line."

"To effect which they betroth him in his cradle, and send him to waste away the exuberant folly of his minority at a distance of fifteen hundred miles from his affianced bride!"

"Had he remained in England, he would probably have visited Gretna-green with his mother's maid. He always looked upon little Lady Anastasia as a bitter dose inflicted upon him by prescription;—and loathed her accordingly."

"And *who* did you say had been honoured by a seat in his britschka?"

"*Britschka!*—you are dreaming, my dear Wallace!—I simply told you that he engaged a *felucca* at Naples; embarked for Corsica with a pretty little actress whom he had stolen away from the Tordinone, or some other minor theatre at Rome;—and they have since been married at Cagliari, by as legal a ceremony as was ever sanctioned by Doctors' Commons, and both Houses of Parliament to boot."

"How cursedly absurd!—And when did the intelligence reach his guardians?"

"Yesterday morning."

"And who are they?—his mother and maiden aunts?"

"No! there is a turtle-eating Lombard-street Baronet—a Sir somebody Westland—by way of man of business; and poor old pottering Lord Bridgenorth—the Ark-adian whom I suspect Noah threw overboard for prosing—by way of man of dignity. This hopeful couple had a cabinet-council of half a dozen hours' duration to decide whether, and *how*, this delicate dilemma should be communicated to the Burgoynes. But Lord Burgoyne had got the start of them!—having received the intelligence by the despatch-bag the day before, from the pen of our resident at Naples."

"And it followed that——"

"That when Sir — Westland made his appearance at ten o'clock last night, and in a private audience, and with infinite pomposity communicated the catastrophe to Lord Burgoyne, and expressed his melancholy hopes that Lady Anastasia's health would withstand the shock of her fatal disappointment—his Lordship had the triumph to reply, that having been already apprized of the delicate fact, his daughter had that morning accepted the hand of the Duke of Lisborough, who had been dining with them *en famille*, and was now sitting with the 'Didone Abbandonata' in the adjoining room."

It was fortunate for Eleanor Willingham that the music of Sir William]Wyndham's creaking shoes—the product of the most eminent Hoby of the Archiepiscopal city of Canterbury —approaching at that moment, served to drown her own irrepressible exclamation of surprise. The Duke of Lisborough and Lady Anastasia Burgoyne!—alas! poor Claudia!

"What could tempt him to select a little insignificant being, who will probably be lost under the shade of her own strawberry-leaves?" exclaimed Sir Comyne Wallace. "Poor Anastasia!—I shall always call her the *Duchessitâ*—for I am persuaded she will never expand into a full-grown, full-blown 'woman of rank and fashion,' as the newspapers phrase it. The Duke of Lisborough!—He who might have thrown the handkerchief to all that was loveliest and brightest and most fascinating in Europe;—he to condemn himself to the digestion of such a piece of

Mere white curd of ass's milk!"

"I suspect that Lady Anastasia's charm, in his Grace's estimation, consisted in the very insignificance you despise. He has been so accustomed to enact the parts of king, queen, and knave, in the Calmersfield pack;—so used to the deference exacted by solitary bachelor supremacy, that it would not have suited him to find his future partlet crow too loudly. His Grace is a great monopolizer of minor prerogatives;—and poor little Burgoyne will not dispute his long-established rights and privileges."

"Every man to his taste!—give *me* a ripple on the waters to prevent utter stagnation!—Give *me* a breeze that is sometimes contrary, to disperse the impulses of health and animation over the surface of the land. A dead calm—a calm for life—is little short of moral extinction."

"And what is to become of all the lions and the unicorns who have been fighting for the crown?—what is to be the destiny of the fair Pretenders to the throne of Calmersfield? —What says Lord Robert to the catastrophe of the farce?"

"'*Farce?*'—I would have you to know that he regards it as the most deadly of tragedies. But hush!—You forget, in your strictures upon the lions and unicorns, that the little Willinghams are within bowshot of the arrows of your irony."

But Sir George Wolryche might have spared his caution. The latter part of his discourse had already been rendered inaudible to Eleanor, by the unmelodious movements of the present object of her own matrimonial manœuvres, and by the still less musical periods of his leaden eloquence. Sir William Wyndham, guided by the delicate tact which instigated all his sayings, and most of his doings, was delivering

to her impatient ears his own version of the Vallerhurst and Lisborough romance; repeatedly assuring her that all the world had believed his Grace to be engaged—or at least deeply attached—to her charming sister; and expressing his earnest trust that Miss Claudia's affections had not been touched, nor her expectations unfairly excited, by the Duke of Lisborough's attentions. "In these times," Sir William delicately observed, "disinterested love was of very rare occurrence; men were apt to exact either rank or fortune, or both, in exchange for the liberty they resigned."

To the high-spirited Eleanor, all this was killing *à coup d'épingles*; and she was in agonies of consternation lest the unhappy Claudia should overhear the well-timed and feeling oration of the man of Kent. Alas!—poor Claudia's auricular sense was blunted beyond the reach of Sir George Wolryche's wit, or Sir William Wyndham's dunderhead sympathy. A mist of mind appeared to envelope every surrounding object; strange sounds and incoherent words rang in her ears. From the moment she had heard the names of the Duke of Lisborough and Lady Anastasia Burgoyne coupled by the report of persons only too intimately versed in their movements and projects, all other sounds appeared incapable of conveying a definite idea to her mind. Eleanor was apprehensive that her sister's abstraction and self-abandonment must be as evident to the whole room as it was to herself;—she would have given worlds for the power of removing her unobserved from the circle;—and every lingering moment of their compulsory sojourn appeared an age to the impatience of her irritation.

She had yet to learn the true nature of Lady Robert Lorton's coterie. She had yet to learn the principles which govern the little republics of aristocratic selfishness;—that in the commonwealths of fashionable life, pleasures and not pains are brought for participation into the general stock;—that the sick lion and the miserable martyr of *bon ton*, are alike condemned to oblivion;—that in the general surprise excited by the announcement of the Duke's marriage, Claudia and her hopes had not once been thought of;—and that amid the joyous excitement of the scene and the hour, her sister's pale cheek and distracted brow were a matter of utter neglect, and utter indifference!

The sisters had, however, a scene and a trial to endure, compared with which the impertinent condolence of the world had been easy of encounter; and this was the first *tête-à-tête* explosion of Lady Maria's disappointment.

Eleanor, who was deeply affected by her sister's condition, exerted her utmost eloquence in the cloak-room to persuade Sir William Wyndham to accept a seat in their carriage. Knowing that his presence would be a restraint upon her

mother's violence, for at least half their road towards Seymour-street, she persisted in assuring him that it was a rainy night—or that it would, could, should, or might rain;—she would not hear of his betaking himself to his cabriolet, which was in attendance. Poor Sir William, albeit somewhat astonished at the interest expressed by Eleanor in the state of his lungs, and his contingent chances of a rheumatic fever—knew not how to resist her impetuous allurements; and almost before he was aware of it, he found himself rolling onwards towards the celibatorial retreats of the Albany, in a rickety landau with three silent women, enacting mute audience to his apologies for the intrusion. In some admiration of their protracted silence, he bade them good night at the door of the porter's lodge; but could his asinine ears have followed the murmur of their departing wheels, his wonder whould have ceased long before they reached the turn of Clifford-street.

Had the Saville Row of those days presented its smooth surface of actual Macadamization, he might have admired the sudden burst of maternal eloquence with which Lady Maria Willingham immediately began to bewail the grievous destiny apparently menacing her patience with the inseparable society and maintenançe of both her daughters!—During her long apprenticeship to worldcraft, she had acquired a habit of control over one of the vilest of tempers; but, like other violent movements subdued by violent coercion, it burst forth at times to rage with redoubled fury. Regardless of the pain and mortification personally endured by her daughters on the present occasion, she hesitated not to aggravate their vexation by a thousand degrading epithets; assuring them that they had been a drawback upon her own comfort and happiness from the hour of their birth, and upbraiding their folly and mismanagement as having solely originated the failure of her favourite project.

"She had forewarned them of the undeviating devotion required by the Duke;—she had forewarned them against a too ready adoption of the habits of Lady Robert Lortou's set, as being offensive to Lady Grayfield, the secret President of his Grace's council—and irritating to the Duke's selfish vanity—the mainspring of his Grace's character. Yet they had laughed, waltzed, flirted with other men—with a set of mere idle, worthless detrimentals—in defiance of her admonitions! They had made their original views upon the Duke apparent to all London—yet had wanted the force of character—the tact—the filial submission—requisite to carry their designs into execution!—Miss Eleanor Willingham had chosen to show herself up, as open to the addresses of a contemptible younger brother such as Mr. Frederick Lorimer; and Miss Claudia had condemned herself to eternal ignominy

by an unavailing siege of Lisborough House! Her uncle, General de Vesci, had told her from the first how the affair would end;—her friend, Lady Monteagle, had apprized her that the whole world laughed at their plot;—even the impertinent Westlands had suggested that the obstinacy of the young ladies would pre-assure them of defeat!—For the future, however, she renounced all interest in their concerns—all measures for their advancement—all hopes of their establishment. They had persisted in exposing themselves beyond the hope of redemption, and might meet the consequences as they could."

A total expenditure of breath alone suspended Lady Maria's harangue. Fortunately it sought not, nor would have brooked a reply; for neither of her daughters were capable of utterance. Let it not be supposed that they were weeping under a sense of her displeasure, of the alarm excited by her repeated assurances of having discarded them for ever from her affections. The high-spirited Eleanor was swelling with indignation; and secretly resolving to accept Sir William Wyndham, whom she despised and detested, on his slightest hint of a proposal, in order to escape from such a home and such a mother; and poor Claudia was aware of a tempest of maternal vituperation, "but nothing wherefore." Her whole frame seemed paralyzed by the shock she had undergone;—and when under her sister's careful tending she retired for the night, she obeyed the injunctions of Eleanor with the submission of a child, and "lay down in her loveliness," with the marble immobility of a statue.

CHAPTER XVII.

Il n'y a point dans le cœur d'une jeune personne un si violent amour, auquel l'intérêt ou l'ambition n'ajouté quelque chose.

LA BRUYERE.

Eleanor Willingham was an intelligent, and, in many respects, an amiable and generously-minded girl. She possessed in an unusual degree those excellent gifts and qualities which may be moulded into virtue by a good education. But from her very earliest hour, her heart had been seared and her mind degraded by the worldly maxims of her lady-mother; and she had now no clearer notions of the moral and religious principles on which the respectable portion of mankind rely for their personal government, than a blind man of the hues of the rainbow. She loved her sister tenderly upon instinct; but as to the rest of the world, she re-

garded them as puppets to be moved by the impulses of her own selfish cunning. Endowed by nature with a sensitive heart and vivid temperament, she had so thoroughly subdued their impulses by the paltry vanities of selfish egotism, that she would have allied herself without hesitation to any man capable of placing her at the head of a brilliant establishment, and gifting her with a fitting tribute of diamonds, plate, equipages, and precedence in society.

She rose, after a night of sleepless self-examination, neither softened, nor humbled, nor inclined to adopt a more modest and feminine course of existence; but nerved to bear with firm defiance the sneers of the world; and to redouble the activity of her measures with a view to the ultimate success of their matrimonial speculations. Such was the boldness of spirit and hardness of heart which the guidance of a better mother might have exalted into moral courage!—into the noble fortitude that shrinks not from encounter with the allotted evils of life.

Her first object was to learn from the Morning Post what degree of publicity had been already thrown upon the intended alliance of the Duke of Lisborough. Her continental education had not prevented her from becoming aware that an English nobleman of any importance cannot be afflicted with the slightest cold, or afflict other people with the most boring of family dinners, without finding himself the immediate hero of a paragraph. In Italy, an event of this description would have furnished the gossip of the Opera-boxes for six months, without the chance of becoming public property; but in England, where newspaper literature forms a mental dram, whose stimulus is coveted from the palace to the village inn, it was inevitable, that the history of the "PROJECTED HYMENEALS IN HIGH LIFE" should come flying abroad, on the wings of all the journals, within four-and-twenty hours from the date of their original projection.

Miss Willingham was fortunate in obtaining a piece of consolotary intelligence from the very same newspaper that set forth the bulletin of the Duke's inconstancy. Lord Stapylford had breathed his last!—and she gratified herself with the consideration that Lady Monteagle and Lady Dynevour would be too busily occupied with their own bombazine and broad hems—with the jointure of the new Dowager and the delinquencies of the new Lord—to bestow their sympathizing tediousness upon their injured friends in Seymour-street; or their patient hearing upon Lady Maria's indiscreet Jeremiades, and unfeeling abuse of her children. Eleanor immediately resolved to procure, if possible, her aunt De Vesci as a lestening-stock to the grievances of the day; being persuaded that *she* would nod in appeasing acquiescence with every murmur and every complaint; and forget every word uttered

by her irritated niece, long before she had reached the mahogany portals of her mansion in Portman-square. Her next measure was a visit of inquiry to Claudia's dressing-room, whom she had left in a leaden slumber, the result of laudanum; and whose mind she was becoming eager to excite to a spirit of self-sustainment equally courageous with her own. She had very little hope, however, of accomplishing so desirable an end. Claudia was naturally indolent and unresisting; easily depressed, and constitutionally timid.

What, therefore, was Eleanor's amazement on entering her sister's diminutive chamber, to find her seated before the glass in the last stage of Mademoiselle Celine's most elaborate efforts, in high spirits, and still higher beauty.

"Where have you been, dearest Nelly, at this early hour?"

"To the De Vescis'—to persuade our worthy old Sleepwalker to take Mamma a long airing in the suburbs. She will be here at two o'clock, and we shall have the morning to ourselves."

"And to what purpose?—you might just as well have allowed her the satisfaction of a grumbling soliloquy at home. Lady Robert has written to offer us her horses to ride this morning; and to say that Lady Desmond and Barbara will call for us at four."

"How kindly arranged on her part!—There is nothing she resigns so reluctantly as her ride; and a canter on the turf was the very thing I was wishing to procure you, as the best remedy for a heavy head or heavy heart."

"You do me less than justice!—Believe me, I am guiltless of either. However, I accepted Lady Robert's proposal with pleasure; offered her my congratulations in my note of thanks, and now I am prepared to appear both merry and wise, to all the morning visitors who may feel inclined to honour us, in the interval, with their scrutiny and criticisms."

"Thank God, I find you prepared to act with so much promptitude, and so much proper pride," said Eleanor, affectionately kissing her forehead. But she started back on discovering that, in spite of her sister's healthful bloom and sparkling eyes, her brow was burning and beating with the unnatural pulsation of feverish excitement. She forebore, however, to comment on the discovery, for she perceived that Claudia was intent on deceiving the whole world; and suspected that perhaps she had succeeded in misleading her secret self, as to the nature of her own feelings.

On establishing themselves in the drawing-room, they had the comfort of perceiving Lady Maria's vehemence had raved itself into sulky silence. She had composed her features into an air of patient martyrdom, and betook herself soon afterwards to the airing offered by Mrs. De Vesci, after the fashion of a saintly victim. Scarcely had she departed, when Lady

Willingham arrived in all the exultation of gratified spite. She had not felt happy from the moment that Mary had despatched her negative to Sir William Wyndham, until that which acquainted her that Lady Maria's ambition had been laid low in the dust, and that the conduct of Lady Monteagle's dissolute grandson had made itself the theme of newspaper commentation. She came prepared to hint, and insinuate, and condole;—and Mary, who was painfully aware of the ungenerous character of her mother's views on this occasion, had accompanied her solely in the intention of pouring balm into any wounds she might be tempted to inflict.

But scarcely were they seated when Claudia, without embarrassment or circumlocution, alluded to the Duke of Lisborough's marriage, as the news of the day; assuring her aunt and cousin that Lady Anastasia Burgoyne was the most interesting girl in London;—that she would form a charming addition to the Calmersfield society;—and that from the moment of her presentation to them by their dear Lady Grayfield, they had pointed her out as exactly the person calculated to become Duchess of Lisborough. Mary's cheeks became flushed with pleasure on discovering her cousin's feelings to be so differently affected from what she had imagined: Lady Willingham was fairly silenced and overcrowed by the boldness of her niece's *sang froid;* and even Eleanor herself was astonished. She had always relied far more upon her own tactics than upon those of Claudia, in the course of their domestic management; but she now felt inclined to resign the palm without further contestation.

Nor did her amazement decrease when she beheld Claudia, in all the brilliant triumph of her beauty, occupying the general attention of the fashionable group of equestrians to which they were attached for the afternoon. Indifferent to her usual apprehensions, she managed Lady Robert Lorton's spirited Arabian with the most fearless grace. Instead of the listless apathy she had accustomed herself to display, since her arrival in England, to every one saving the favoured Lisborough, she had now assumed an air of joyous animation and general affability, which imparted a new character to her loveliness; and before they reached the extremity of the park, Lord Cosmo had deserted Lady Barbara Desmond's side; Sir George Wolryche's ringing laugh formed an unintermitting echo to her sallies—and Mr. Tichborne, detaching himself from Lady Barringhurst's party, which they encountered by the way, followed in the wake of the beautiful being whose equestrian grace he declared to be unrivalled, saving by the lovely Centauress of the Grecian gem.

Eleanor was delighted by this very unexpected triumph. She overheard the absurdity of the Duke of Lisborough's choice the topic of universal satire. Wolryche protested that

Maraban was engaged in inventing satin leading-strings, and Mechlin bibs and tuckers for her Grace's *trousseau*;—and Henry Mulgrave deposed to having seen the model of a *bombonnière* at Rundell's, on which the finest diamonds of the Lorton casket were to be set for her use. All the men of the party were congregated round Claudia; and a place was consequently vacant at her own fair side for the monopoly of Sir William Wyndham, whose red face, blue coat, and buff waistcoat she soon saw advancing towards her, and who listened with some impatience to the Lisborough debate.

"Don't you think it very hard, Miss Willingham," said he, with a solemn air and emphasis, "that a man can't marry according to his own liking, without being hauled over the coals in this sort of way?"

"Hauled over the coals!" reiterated Eleanor, to whom the domestic idioms of England were not particularly familiar.

"Without being brought to book by persons who have no right either to meddle or make in the business?"

Eleanor, who was aware that her honourable friend was one of the most eminent "country gentlemen speakers" in the House, found herself rather puzzled by his eloquence.

"For my own part," resumed Sir William, "I own myself to be Downright Dunstable; and what I say is, that where friends are agreeable, and the young lady not averse, there is nothing like making hay while the sun shines; and if the world chooses to have its laugh—why let it. If I could be married to-morrow after my own choosing, by Jupiter, I should care no more for the jeers of my club, than for a hard rain after a harvest."

"The Duke of Lisborough has made a choice extremely gratifying to his family and friends," observed Eleanor Willingham, anxious that the proposal which she feared would follow the preamble, should be made in a somewhat less public position. "Lady Anastasia Burgoyne is a niece of his sister, Lady Grayfield's, and the Duke has known her from her infancy."

"Ay—ay;—training and pedigree all in her favour!—to judge of the kitling you should know something of the cat and her breed. A vastly sensible woman is that Lady Grayfield—no flummery about her.—I sit next pew to her at church; and I observe that she is not ashamed of making her responses as audible as the clerk's."

"It is fortunate that all the congregation are not equally fond of hearing their own voices," said Eleanor.

"For my own part," continued Sir William, replying to his own train of reflections, "I *will* say that I abominate the sight of a real high-flying woman of fashion, with her rouge, and *écarté* and flirting, and what not. Now, there's that daughter of my worthy neighbour, Lady Monteagle—Lady

Stapylford I mean;—a fine kettle of fish *she* has made of it! For full ten years after Margaret Monteagle married, it was Lady Stapylford here—Lady Stapylford there—who but Lady Stapylford!—Lady Stapylford's new chariot at the birth-day—Lady Stapylford's masked balls—Lady Stapylford's diamonds at Carlton House—were as regular matters for newspaper discussion as the Slave Trade, or the annual debate on Emancipation. And all this time, how was her family going on, I should like to know?—My Lord was either at Newmarket, or playing hundred-guinea-whist, by day-light, at Brookes's;—her hopeful son was tying fireworks to his tutor's pigtail; and her half-starved servants, balked of their board-wages, were forced to live on the venison and pine-apple left from her ladyship's entertainments. The consequence is, that the Stapylford estate is mortgaged up to its ears: and when the young Lord comes of age, he will be obliged to sell his fine Yorkshire property, or completely strip the Stapylford Park woods to clear off his own scores with the Jews. And so much for the management of a woman of fashion."

"By your own account," said Eleanor, laughing at his vehemence, "the blame, in this instance, lies chiefly with the *gentlemen* of the family."

"A bad wife is sure to make a bad husband. If the sun won't shine, a fig for the crop."

"The present Lord Stapylford is a very fine young man."

"*Fine?*—a mere milksop! looks just like Madame Vestris in boy's clothes in a farce. *Fine?*—a mere frivolous silk-worm!"

"You do not appear partial to the family. I am surprised, however, to hear you tax Lord Stapylford with effeminacy; for we hear of him constantly at Melton, at prize-fights, and steeple-chases. Lady Monteagle's chief complaint against her grandson is that he prefers a rat-hunt to the opera."

"That is just a lady's idea of manliness!—A lad, like Stapylford, has a whole stable of hunters put off upon him, which he cannot ride, either by some rogue of a horse-dealer, or some greater rogue of a fashionable friend; and down he goes to Melton to have them broke, or broke down, by all the crack riders of the hunt; while *he* stays at home, drinking iced whisky punch, and playing hazard;—having paid through the nose, with *post obit* bonds, for a stud which he scarce ever sees till it comes to the hammer in a spring sale at Tattersall's."

Miss Willingham, who perceived that Mr. Tichborne was lending a sly ear to this delicate investigation, would gladly have changed the topic of discourse, but Sir William seldom bestowed his attention, except upon the mute arguments of his own mill-wheel of a mind.

"As to the prize-fights, rat-hunts, and steeple-chases, the

boy knows as much about them as you do. He is taken there by his cursed rascals of tuft-hunting toadies—like a pigeon in a trap—only to be made a mark of; and is brought back in a hack tandem, to an eight o'clock dinner at Long's, prating about Jacko Mackako, and a loser by some thousands on the long odds."

A sneer that passed between Tichborne and Lord Cosmo, as the echoes of this neat and appropriate discourse reached their ears, brought a blush of shame to the cheek of Eleanor Willingham. "When I become Lady Wyndham," thought she, "I must certainly borrow Papageno's padlock, to secure those boorish lips. At all events, I will take care to amend his taste for riding in the Park, or commenting upon the movements of civilized Christians."

"What party is that before us?" inquired Eleanor, aloud, of Lord Cosmo Somerset, resolved to divert the conversation into another channel.

"Oh! that is Lady Radbourne—obliged to hold on her hat while she bends her ear to poor old prosing Lord Botherby, whom she worships because his grand-daughter is a patroness of Almack's. I would hazard a bet that he is favouring her Ladyship with a topographical plan of the riots of eighty; or resuscitating some pithy observation of 'my esteemed friend, the late Charles Wyndham.'"

"And that noisy set who are making a coasting tour of the Serpentine?"

"Do you not recognize old Lorimer, on his yeomanry charger, and his little pee-wits of daughters on their ponies? He looks like a solemn seventy-four, convoying a fleet of cockle shells!"

"Or like a gray gander, protecting his covey of goslins," replied Eleanor. "At the distance of a mile one might identify the cackling of the Lorimer gamut."

"I always fancied the Miss Lorimers were particular friends of your's!" interposed the astonished Sir William.

"They *are* friends, and distant cousins," replied Eleanor calmly; "which is the reason I take the liberty of abusing them. I should be sorry to leave the foibles of my family in the hands of strangers."

The sun was now sinking low—the Park was getting thin—and Sir William Wyndham hungry. "I have promised Lady Robert Lorton to escort you no further than her house," said Lady Desmond to the Willinghams. "She wants you to dine with her; and has, I believe, procured your mother's sanction, your maid's assistance, and your evening dress."

"The girls, who desired nothing so eagerly as an escape from home, readily acquiesced; and as Sir William assisted Eleanor from her horse in Arlington-street, he failed not to

breathe in her ear the ominous, but expected, whisper: "At what o'clock shall I find Lady Maria at home, to-morrow?"

"We are always visible at two!" replied Miss Willingham, blushing with disgust at the awkward assiduities of a man, whom she had already determined to accept as the wedded partner of her future life—as her inevitable companion through time, and through eternity!

Ten minutes afterwards she had almost forgotten his existence, among the varied excitements and elegant joyousness of Lady Robert's fascinating circle.

CHAPTER XVIII.

I do not reserve all my compassion for the griefs that stalk in buskins. When people's griefs are of that dignity and public character, they can lay them in state, sing solemn dirges over them, inter them with funeral pomp, and set up a superb monument of them. They taste the "*luxury* of wo;" but the griefs that must be privately buried in the breast are the most bitter. MRS. MONTAGU'S LETTERS.

THERE were various reasons which rendered the coterie in Arlington-street more than commonly agreeable on the day in question. The party was an *impromptu*;—having been formed in the course of the morning, after Lord Robert's departure for his Buckinghamshire estate, where he was in the habit of enjoying the first appearance of the May-fly every spring; and where, on the present occasion, he was bent upon the solitary enjoyment of his own ill-humour. It was highly improbable that the most speckled trout, or Leviathanic pike, would charm him from the remembrance of the forfeited reversion of a ducal coronet, and one hundred and twenty thousand per annum!

His good-natured but listless wife, who sympathized more with his affliction than with its motive, became suddenly anxious to disguise the real nature of his feelings. Summoning, therefore, all her enchantments around her, she improvisated a little *fête*, as if in honour of the projected alliance of her brother-in-law; and as her indolent nature was positively excited and amused by the whole affair—by Lady Grayfield's able manœuvring, and Lisborough's easy dupery—she appeared in far more than her usual spirits, and exercised a double share of her usual fascinations. The little circle, readily receiving the infection of her buoyant gaiety, and relieved from a high-pressure engine of dulness by the absence of Lord Robert Lorton, formed an electric chain, emitting sparkles of incessant brilliancy;—and Claudia and Elea-

nor, who had urgent motives for assuming an aspect of gladness, were not slow to contribute to the colloquial animation and varying diversions of the evening.

Bout-rimés, ballads *(mis en action)*, acted charades, and proverbs, and *tableaux*, succeeded each other; till Lady Barbara Desmond, the listless Lady Barringhurst, Lady Rachel Verney, and even Mrs. Grandison, although usually vivacious and agile as a bird, cried eagerly for a respite; which was agreeably occupied by Henry Mulgrave and his guitar, Lord Cosmo Somerset's inimitable mimicries, Sir Comyne's lively anecdotes of other lands, and Mr. Tichborne's piquant edition of the scandals of his own.

It was an unpleasing interruption when the carriage came to fetch them home;—to that home which was wearisome from its paltry mediocrity—loathsome as the parliament of their matrimonial plots and conspiracies—and awful at the present crisis as the den of their maternal tigress, whose irritations were appalling even to her kindred cubs. They prepared themselves to find the countenance of Lady Maria, on their return to Seymour-street, lowering and portentous as an April thunder-cloud!

Great and startling, therefore, was their delight, on finding themselves greeted as "her dearest children!" and caressed and flattered as tenderly as when basking in the warmest sunshine of their Calmersfield popularity!

"You had a tolerably pleasant dinner at the General's?" inquired Eleanor.

"Very passable—far less boring than usual;—and you, my love?"

"*Our* party was delightful."

"Anything new?—any gossip of to-day?"

"A ball at Lady Radbourne's next week; and a majority against Ministers to-night in the Commons."

"What have we to do with such trash as Lady Radbourne, or the House?—My information has been more to the purpose."

Eleanor drew a chair towards the table, and affected to busy herself with the visiting tickets, the result of her morning's absence, which lay on the table in a gilded standish.

"Your uncle De Vesci—extremely enraged by the Duke of Lisborough's conduct, and somewhat touched by my hint that his own interference has been materially instrumental in our disappointment—has sent you a bank-bill for five hundred pounds, to provide against a very brilliant *fête* which he purposes giving immediately, in order that *we* may invite the company, and profit during the remainder of the season by the popularity it will purchase!"

"Five hundred pounds:—My dear Mamma! It is a perfect fortune!—Think of all the trinkets it will purchase!"

"In the next place I have the pleasure of informing you, that the Duke of Lisborough's affairs are horribly involved; that he marries Lady Anastasia Burgoyne chiefly for the temporary relief to be afforded by her fifty thousand pounds; and that they are going abroad to economize, immediately after the ceremony."

"Involved!—the Duke of Lisborough!—Impossible, my dear Mamma?—Consider for a moment his rent-roll and resources!"

"Consider also his profuse expenditure;—his taste for building and *écarté*—and the strict entail by which his hands are tied. He has no command of ready money—no power of raising it except on ruinous terms—and the system of exorbitant interest once commenced, there is no end to its aggravation of evil. In short, Sir Robert Westland, who sat next to me to-day at dinner, assures me that his Grace's bonds are good for little or nothing in the city; and that this silly marriage of his is generally regarded as a mere pecuniary arrangement."

"Without yielding the least faith to such an opinion, I own I am delighted that it should prevail; for whether true or false, it renders a very satisfactory and healing balsam to Claudia's feelings, and our own pride."

"And in the third place, my dear Eleanor, I learned from Sir Peter Westland, the fat Commissioner, who never misses his trot round the Park, that Sir William Wyndham was your constant attendant this morning;—that your approaching marriage is the theme of general discourse; and that his estates in Kent average a clear twenty thousand a-year."

"He is, without exception, the most ill-bred fool—the most self-opinionated boor I ever beheld!" exclaimed Eleanor, by way of probing her mother's feelings.

"Now pray let me hear no fastidious nonsense of that description," replied Lady Maria, peevishly. "A girl in your dependent situation should not presume to make exceptions; for what would become of both you and your sister, I should like to know, in case of my death? Do you think you should be happier or more respectable sponging as a poor relation at Heddeston Court—or maintaining your own rank in life at the head or Sir William Wyndham's princely establishment?"

"—Loathing my husband—neglecting his children—and watching every day for an increase of plethoric symptoms on his full-moon visage, in the hope of approaching apoplexy!"

"Eleanor!—Eleanor!"

"I should certainly order his ale and soup to be annually strengthened, in the hope of accelerating the affair; or perhaps bring myself within the reach of the penalties of the

law, by tightening his white cotton cravat while he is snoring after a long day's run with the hounds."

"I cannot listen to these offensive rhapsodies;—such observations are infinitely disgusting."

"Will you listen to one which is considerably more so in *my* estimation?—Will you listen to my assurance that I have firmly resolved to accept Sir William Wyndham; and that I have promised him a private audience to-morrow, at two o'clock, here—in this very house?"

"My dearest Eleanor!" exclaimed Lady Maria, rising and embracing her, "*now* you speak like a girl of sense and feeling, such as I always took you to be!—Accept him?—Who for a moment could doubt it?—So desirable a connexion!—an unincumbered estate of twenty thousand a-year!"

"Unincumbered?—with that mass of mortality attached to the demesne?"

"My dear! I have the greatest respect for Sir William;—your poor dear father always looked up to Wyndham Park as the first property in the country;—always supported the late Sir Roger throughout his elections. Nay! at one time they talked of setting up an opposition pack of fox-hounds between them. I am convinced that nothing would have afforded poor dear Sir Charles, and even poor old Sir Claude, so much gratification as an alliance between one of their descendants and Wyndham Park."

"If that descendant, *like* the park, were a mere mass of clods, I could sympathize in their triumph. Unfortunately she chances to be endued with sensibilities which may hereafter render both the park and its proprietor very vexatious appendages."

"Now, my sweet Eleanor ——"

"My dear Mamma!—with *you*—allow me to be candid!—I will play my part to admiration in presence of the world; but I shall revenge myself *on* myself by always confessing to my mother that I abhor and despise my husband."

"I will leave Sir William and his family diamonds to plead their own cause," said Lady Maria, affecting to laugh off her secret confusion and dismay at Eleanor's vehemence. "And now, my dear child, let me beg of you to go to bed, and compose your spirits, in order that at Sir William's visit to-morrow, your own bright eyes may rival the brilliancy of his family diamonds."

"Claudia has been gone these ten minutes," replied Eleanor, deliberately lighting her candle, and kissing her hand to her mother. "I fear my poor sister's spirits will be more difficult of composure than mine."

On reaching her own apartment, Eleanor received from the smiling lips of Mademoiselle Celine a message from her sister, saying that she had retired to rest with a severe head-

ache, and begged not to be disturbed; on which, having given her orders for the morrow, and dismissed her attendant, she threw herself into an arm-chair to indulge in half an hour's reverie—a circumstance of rare occurrence with the lively Eleanor Willingham. And whither strayed those visionary thoughts—to whom—to what—reverted her recollections—as she sat twining the raven tresses between her unconscious fingers, and strove to chide away the blush that rose unbidden to her cheek?—Was it Frederick Lorimer's voice that seemed to tingle in her ears as she shuddered at the thought of the morrow's wooing?—was it *his* grace of person, *his* elegance of person, *his* playfulness of spirit that arrayed the uprising phantom, which appeared as if interposed between herself and happiness?—Did any whispered vows of youthful love steal back upon her soul as she clasped her hands together in sudden agony?—Yes! Frederick was avenged!—there were tears in her eyes—despair in her heart!—She felt that the happiness of her innocent youth was departing from her;—that she was about to sacrifice her own self-esteem—and for ever!

With hasty impatience she arose, and began hurriedly to disencumber herself of her evening ornaments. "For these, and baubles such as these," murmured Eleanor, as she heaped them in glittering confusion upon her dressing-table, "I am about to renounce the peace and respectability of my future existence. Henceforth no solitude—no communing with myself—no trust in my own rectitude! I shall, my very self, be the first to appreciate the indelicacy, the knavery of my own conduct, and to despise Eleanor Wyndham as she will deserve to be despised."

She started!—for a low moan of pain, or of distress, appeared to proceed from her sister's adjoining chamber. Throwing on her mantle, she prepared to infringe upon Claudia's prohibition:—in a moment she was standing by her bedside.

"My dear—dear sister!" she whispered in a soothing voice;—but a faint murmur of despondency was still the only reply.

Astonished and alarmed, Eleanor returned into her own room for a light, which enabled her to perceive her afflicted sister sitting up in bed with an air of wild unconsciousness, and rocking herself backwards and forwards, as if to subdue the sense of pain.

"You are ill! dearest Claudia," again whispered Eleanor, while the most terrible apprehensions took possession of her mind.

Claudia waved her head, as if in negative reply; but neither spoke, nor discontinued her movements.

"Speak—sister;—tell me, I beseech you—what can I do to relieve you?"

"Nothing!" answered Claudia, in a hollow voice; "nothing—nothing!" and she smote her hands despairingly upon her bosom.

Eleanor, dreading that her sister's reason was departing from her, threw herself upon the pillow behind her, clapsed her in her arms, and drew her head gently towards her own bosom. "My dear sister," she faultered, "remember that if you persist in this horrible silence, I must call for other assistance. Surely you would not wish that any one beside your own Eleanor should witness your present condition."

But her kindness had more influence on the sufferer than her threats; in a moment she found the warm tears of Claudia falling upon her hands!—Again she pressed her sister's throbbing brow tenderly towards her. "Claudia—Claudia!" she exclaimed, "if you have any pity upon me—if you have any confidence in my affection, relieve my mind from its vague terrors.—What can have agitated you thus?"

"And do *you* ask me?" faltered Claudia Willingham at length, with a gasping voice. "Do you not know that he is about to be united to another?"

"The Duke—the Duke of Lisborough?"

Claudia pressed her sister's hand in assent.

"Good God! and can disappointed ambition prevail thus over your reason?—Can the loss of mere worldly distinction thus agonize a human heart?"

"Oh! Eleanor!"

"I can scarcely forgive you—Claudia, scarcely sympathize with you! Surely a woman's pride ought to render her superior to such paltry weakness. Regard the affair as a game of skill, at which you have been defeated, but do not waste your tears upon a matter of mere interest."

"Of *mere* interest!—how little do you know me!"

"Of what else;—you cannot have *loved* the Duke of Lisborough?"

Again Claudia Willingham smote her hands upon her bosom. "Fondly—passionately!" she murmured. "Yet till I was hopeless of return, I had rather died than own it."

Eleanor leaned back against the pillow in utter consternation. She could neither discredit nor comprehend her sister's assertion. "When we last spoke together upon this subject—" she began—

"It is very long since!" interrupted Claudia. "I remember it well—it was at Calmersfield. Three months form a period capable of changing the opinions or feelings of any woman."

"Yet you might have been more candid with your sister;

you might have acquainted me with your altered views as they gradually arose."

"I was in daily hopes of receiving some declaration from Lisborough, which might seem to excuse the unclaimed devotion of my heart towards him. And even *you*, Eleanor, ask yourself whether you were not explicit with *me*, relative to Frederick Lorimer and your intentions."

"My dear Claudia! we have been both to blame," replied Eleanor, frankly offering her the hand she had withdrawn in a momentary movement of vexation. "But tell me, love—for all this is still incomprehensible to my mind—tell me, if it be not too painful to you, how long you have loved this odious man, and why have you hitherto so scrupulously concealed it from me?"

"Because I saw that you disliked and despised him. *I*, you know, Nelly, never was gifted with your talents; I have always been less difficult and more forbearing than yourself, even in the choice of our acquaintance. In Italy, I used to laugh and dance with the Duke of Lisborough, without distinguishing him from others, because I thought, and felt, and acted as a child; and because at that time the ideas of love and marriage had never entered my head, except as things remote and visionary, and solely connected with our return to England."

"It is very true;—and we were both happier then, were we not, dearest Claudia? We lived but to amuse ourselves, without bestowing a care on these plots and cabals of Mamma's, which *have* formed, and will form, our bane through life."

"It was in the same frame of mind we first visited Calmersfield. We saw every one labouring to attract the Duke's attention; and the probability of his bestowing his hand upon another, was the first thing that warned me of my own predilection in his favour. I remember well that a twinge of jealousy first betrayed my secret to myself."

"Would to Heaven you had never chanced to make so unfortunate a discovery!"

"I will not say that the favourable prejudice attached to his rank and brilliant position did not tend to heighten the character of my feelings, and to suggest the emulation with others by which I sought to attract and fix his notice. But from the time that I *did* attract it—from the moment that I fancied I *had* fixed it—I loved him for himself, and himself only!"

"Good heavens!" exclaimed Eleanor, clasping her hands together with irrepressible vexation; "that empty, stupid, disagreeable man!"

Claudia laid a gentle but reproving hand upon her lips. "My dear sister! spare me! or I shall proceed no further with my confession."

Eleanor kissed the cold hand thus interposed, and promised forbearance.

"No woman," observed Claudia, "can judge of the merits or captivations of any man till he has appeared before her in the character of a lover. Had I seen and known Lisborough but as he moves in general society, I should have continued to regard him as pompous, and tiresome, and uninteresting. But these visible defects arise less from his natural *hauteur* than from a degree of personal shyness which few suspect in him;—which he cannot repress, and therefore attempts to veil under a mask of stately reserve. In his intimacy with myself he ventured to throw off that mask—to appear in his natural character—a character but too fascinating—too enchanting for my happiness."

Again Eleanor made a movement expressive of impatience.

"You may remember, Nelly, that at Calmersfield we two were always *tête-à-tête*, whether in its crowded evening *réunion*, or in the morning solitude of its walks and gardens. In these interviews, his heart—at least, I thought so then—was unreservedly laid open before me. He spoke to me of the hollow coldness of his position in the world—of the mistrust with which it inspired him—of the fastidious delicacy of his feelings towards women, and of his dread of awaking from some dream of fancied affection, to find that it had been solely prompted by his extrinsic qualifications. I am persuaded that at that period he was both conscious of the existence of mine, and confident of the disinterestedness of its devotion."

"Fool! to fling away the possession of a jewel he so little deserved, and which will never be vouchsafed him from any other quarter!—But why, dear Claudia, why were you at that time so reserved with me on the subject?"

"I saw that you undervalued the Duke; and feared that you would persist in misinterpreting the nature of my own feelings. With Mamma I was more ingenuous."

"And what were her sapient counsels on so delicate an occasion?"

"To hazard everything in order to secure a proposal. She told me, that with any other man, nothing was so politically important as the observation of the strictest delicacy; that, with any *other*, my first object should be to maintain the semblance of indifference. But that the Duke had been so long accustomed to the officious importunities of interested women, and had habituated himself to the exaction of such unceasing incense and homage, that he would consider me cold, and stern, and heartless, if I persevered in affecting unconsciousness of his regard."

"Wretched sophistry!—as if the delicate prompting of a womanly nature was not the best guide on such occasions."

"She bade me beware of listening, Nelly, to *your* flighty arguments, and lofty opinions. I am persuaded that she is rather afraid of your downright frankness on many occasions; and I own that, for a time, she inspired me with a similar alarm."

"But the Duke—"

"At her instigation, I no longer laboured to conceal my preference. He was, alas! I fear only too fully aware of my affection; and, at first, it appeared to redouble his own predilection in my favour. When I left Calmersfield, we were all but declared lovers. Every hour, every minute, I expected a formal proposal to Mamma; nor, had he been a beggar, and I an empress, could I have awaited his measures with a fonder degree of disinterested tenderness."

Eleanor rose, and hastily traversed the room!—she could scarcely repress her feelings of indignation. "And the change?—have you no clue to its origin?"

"Alas! I might fairly answer, 'none!' for my own vague suspicions have been my only guide. But you are as well aware as myself that we have many enemies, and very few friends who would have looked upon my elevation with a favourable eye. It appears that Mamma's character as a manœuvrer is generally recognized in society; the whole business was looked upon as a speculation;—even *you*, Nelly, were sceptical touching the possible existence of my affection for Lisborough;—Lady Grayfield, Lord Robert, and all their shuffling clan, were busy in their reports of our poverty, and ambition, and baseness of spirit; and the Duke having once learned to regard himself as a dupe, began to think with disgust of me, and of the whole affair. That horrible ball at Lisborough House!—shall I ever—ever forget it?"

"Yet how well you succeeded in deceiving me and all the world! On my honour, Claudia—on my honest word, I believed the Duke of Lisborough to be utterly indifferent to your feelings—saving as the proprieter of Calmersfield, and as the best match in England."

Miss Willingham pressed her hands despairingly upon her bosom. "A woman's pride is an urgent preceptor!—but look, Nelly—ever since the painful moment that served to undeceive me—even thus have I been affected." She drew her white handkerchief across her lips, and held it towards her sister stained and moistened with blood.—Eleanor started.

"What it has cost me to disguise and subdue my feelings, I trust you may never know; for it is a lesson that experience alone can teach. I have never slept, Eleanor;—I have rested neither by day nor by night; and all this agony has been endured with a smiling countenance, mocking and redoubling my anguish."

"Ungrateful idiot that he is!" said her sister, vehemently. "May he atone for the sorrow he has caused you upon a pillow of thorns!"

"Hush! hush! hush!—will you never learn to appreciate the nature of my feelings towards him?—I am not mortified, Nelly—I am *not* disappointed;—his coronet and his fortune I resign without one movement of regret;—I am only most unhappy—most miserable——" she paused—oppressed by her emotions, and again Eleanor kindly took her hand.

"While I had any reason to believe that the change in Lisborough's conduct arose from wanton caprice—from the mere cruel inconstancy of human nature—my pride armed my courage to meet the blow. I did not sink *then*, dear Nelly. You cannot upbraid me with having shrunk beneath Mamma's unkind revilings, or the thousand impertinences which I saw on the point of being levelled against us. But the news of to-day I cannot nerve myself to bear so easily!—To think of *him* as a victim equally miserable with myself—to see *him* condemned to sacrifice *his* feelings to the painful exigencies of worldly wants——"

Eleanor interrupted her with indignant impatience. "And can you really be the dupe of such trifling and manifest misrepresentation?" said she. "The Duke of Lisborough is confessed to be one of the most opulent subjects in Europe. His affairs are involved—his rent-roll diminished—the immediate claims upon his resources are perplexingly urgent;—grant it—grant it all;—although we know it but from the gossiping reports of one of those upstart Westlands—a man living absolutely without the pale of good society."

"And therefore the more to be trusted," interposed Claudia, gently. "A mere man of business knows the peril of trifling with people's pecuniary reputations. I should not believe Sir Robert Westland's report of a fashionable marriage;—I do of a fashionable mortgage—it is his vocation."

"That point I have already conceded. But even supposing the Duke to be embarrassed to a most degrading and improbable degree, think you that had he been attached to you with a true, and honest, and fervent affection, he would not have found ample means to gratify his wishes?—He knows that *his* poverty is wealth to us—that we are not princesses of the empire, to be wooed with principalities and argosies. If it be his destiny to live in expatriation, *you* might as easily have accompanied him in his exile as Lady Anastasia Burgoyne;—nay! he was well aware that you would have even *preferred* a residence on the Continent to Calmersfield and all its glories."

"With *him* I could have been happy any where."

"Then never again tell me that he loved you," cried Eleanor, with generous indignation. "Had he nourished one

grain of pure attachment, he would have been aware of yours; and seeing it, he would have braved all risks and difficulties to make you his wife. Do not let his pecuniary embarrassments be a cloak to the naked truth;—a man with his revenues is beyond the personal reach of their pressure. No! no! he never truly loved you."

"Eleanor!—if *you* love *me*, you will not say that again," faltered Claudia in a low concentrated voice while her cheeks became blanched to a death-like pallor, and her trembling lips were again suffused with their former unsightly tinge.

"Compose yourself, dear sister!" said Eleanor, soothingly, as she wiped away the sanguine drops.

"I cannot—if you persist in saying that he did not love me!—I can bear to believe that circumstances compelled him to resign my affection, but not that he wilfully deceived me!"

"Ah! what will my mother have to answer for," exclaimed Eleanor, wringing her hands, "in having permitted, in having urged you to cherish this hopeless, this unavailing attachment? *She* knew the peril of your position;—she saw that the happiness of your whole future life was hazarded on the die; and yet, for her own ambition's sake, she urged you to dare the danger. My mother would have seen her children pass through fire to Moloch, had she but been secure of profiting by the sacrifice."

"He will be miserable with Lady Anastasia," said Claudia, musingly, and without sharing in her sister's outbreak of angry feeling. "The Burgoynes are totally wanting in the refinement to which he has accustomed himself till it has become essential to his happiness. She will shock all his prejudices—disappoint all his selfish exactions;—and when he finds that he has married a mere tool of Lady Grayfield's—he who has such a terror of being duped—he will become disgusted, and endure at least as much vexation and regret as he must secretly know that he has allotted as my own future destiny!"

"May your augury be fulfilled—and you will be nobly avenged!"

"I shall never make you feel and think as *I* do, Nelly!—While he is happy, I shall bear my lot with patience; but let me know him to be repining and wretched, and my courage will fail me. Alas! I hardly yet know all I may have to suffer."

"Claudia!" said her sister, gravely, "you have better feelings in your heart than I have hitherto found in mine. You deserved not that this blow should fall upon you;—*I*, who have profited so much more deeply by Lady Maria's lessons—I, who have so callous and so worldly a heart, might

have borne it better. You saw how it resisted Frederick Lorimer's disinterested affection, and its own warm impulses; and you shall see it do yet more wondrous things. I love nothing but you, sister!—and I *will* love nothing else;—trust to me, dearest Claudia, to devote all my time and thoughts to your comfort and consolation;—trust to my unceasing efforts to watch over your failing health, and to drive the remembrance of this worthless man from your bosom." She threw her arms around the sufferer, and embraced her tenderly as she spoke.

"And my mother!—Oh! Eleanor, think of all the unkindness—all the taunts—all the mortifications I shall have to endure from Mamma!"

"Not long, Claudia!—you will not have to bear them long. I have the prospect of a permanent, and if not a *happy*, at least a respectable home, by marrying Sir William Wyndham."

"But you are not in earnest; you cannot intend to sacrifice yourself to that vulgar boor—to a man you so utterly despise!"

"Enough!—the measure is resolved upon; and his chance is the more favourable, that I am sadly out of conceit just now with delicacy and refinement. Before this hour to-morrow, I shall have accepted the veriest bore in England; and remember, dearest Claudia, that I have bespoken your society and companionship in mitigation of the desolate splendours of my gilded cage. Be well—be happy—my dear, dear sister—and I will bear my own destiny without a murmur."

Again the half-exhausted Claudia would have remonstrated; but Eleanor, who saw all the dangers of her perturbation, peremptorily obliged her to lie down, and compose herself to rest. Then, drawing a chair to her couch, she watched by her bedside until the miserable girl had sobbed herself into a heavy and unnatural sleep.

CHAPTER XIX.

Rien de plus triste que la mort, et tout ce qui tient à son cortège ; c'est une image que peu de gens ont la force de supporter, par la raison que c'est un malheur auquel personne n'a l'espoir de se soustraire. Il n'en est pas moins vrai que le ridicule peut l'atteindre : il y trouve une source de comique que le bon gout ne reprove pas toujours.—JOUY.

"IT is better," saith the divine precept, "to go into the house of mourning than into the house of feasting." The customs and abuses of modern times have rendered this admonition somewhat difficult of comprehension! The house of *sorrow* may retain its ancient value as a moral corrective; but the house of mourning—the house of *inheritance*—is often degraded into an arena for the vilest passions, and the basest impulses, which dishonour the human images of an immortal Creator.—Such was the mansion of Lord Stapylford!

His Lordship had breathed his last with a becoming *cordon sanitaire* of medical advisers round his bed; he had been consigned to the shroud with a degree of professional pomp becoming his rank;—the presidents of two colleges had shed the light of their grim and solemn countenances upon the scene;—the apothecary was an apothecary of ton; the cupper was a fashionable cupper. His Lordship had departed this life in all the odour of professional sanctity.

But if *two* among the learned faculties had contributed their aid and consolation to Lord Stapylford's departure, the mighty comforts of the *third* had been wholly wanting! His pulse had been periodically and anxiously felt—his will legally signed—but no one had thought for a moment of whispering in his ear than one redeeming word of hope, which forms an anchor of sustainment to the fleeting soul;—no one had dreamed of inquiring into his inward faith—or of suggesting the becoming frame of mind for a departing Christian.—He had died, and *made no sign!*

The two Presidents had immediately inquired for their carriages,

> With signs of sorrow,
> Despairing of their fee to-morrow!

The apothecary had departed unto his pharmacy, to add up the sum total of his late Lordship's bill, in readiness for the summons of the executors. The family lawyer had ensconced himself, with his tin cases, in a hackney-coach; in order

that his clerks might instantly neb their pens for a duplicate of the last will and testament, to be submitted for counsels' opinion; and the sick-nurses, having turned a key upon the chamber of death, were seated in an adjoining apartment, "enjoying a comfortable drop of tea," and jocosely calculating the probable amount of their perquisites. In the servants' hall affairs were yet more merrily arranged; and while the butler was favouring the housekeeper, in the steward's room, with a bottle of his choicest Chambertin, to drink the health of the new Lord, John was explaining to Thomas, over a modicum of humble port, that "thank God their troubles were over, and that they should receive their long arrears of board wager from the executors."—Twelve hours more, and the merry-men of the undertaker were installed, under authority, throughout the house; again twelve hours, and certain chambers were muffled with black hangings, and lugubriously enlightened by funeral tapers, while all the lower regions were converted into a temple of riot and intemperance.

And where were the widow's tears which should have embalmed the memory of the dead?—where was the filial piety that should have hallowed those shrouded relics from the touch of vulgar profanation?—Margaret, the Lady Dowager Stapylford, the ex-patroness, the withered *élégante*, the former queen of fashion—had rushed instantly, upon the formal announcement of her lord's decease, into a travelling chariot, which was waiting at the door to convey her with her favourite maid, and lap-dog, and salvolatile, to her mother's dower-house, in Kent; there to remain in the decorous seclusion exacted by *bon ton* and etiquette, until after "the last mournful ceremony;" and Montagu—eighth Lord Stapylford—was giving audience, at Mivart's Hotel, to the tailor who was selected for the composition of his mourning! Mr. Tichborne was stationed at his elbow, preparing him with the best instructions in what manner to evade the inquisition of "those cursed bores of executors," and how to parry the cupidity of his widowed mother!

"Those fellows will be wanting you to sign releases, and sanction an increase of jointure; they will recommend that one of the trustees should reside on your Yorkshire estate, and another on the Kentish property, in order to save them from rack and ruin during the remainder of your minority. Depend on it they will not hear of advancing a shilling towards rescuing you from your own embarrassments;—all the old servants they persuade you to pension off, they will take at half price into their own households; and all the timber they persuade you to cut down, they will purchase at half its value on their own speculation. All that sort of thing is part of a trustee's business.—I know them of old!—I saw how they managed poor Vallerhurst's affairs; fattening upon his undoing—drinking his wine—eating his venison—thinning his preserves; and all

upon pretence of diminishing the Dowager-widow's responsibility, and doing their duty by the property."

"The deuce of it is that, what with my debts, and my detestation of business, I shall fall cursedly into their power. My mother's trustees were always bullying my father, and getting injunctions against him in Chancery;—and, by the way, I suspect their vexatious interference was chiefly the cause of the ill-blood existing between my illustrious parents;—and now they will pounce upon me, and after inserting their talons into my property beyond my power of disentanglement, will suck the last vital drop that my father's extravagance and my own have left in its veins."

"His Lordship talks, Mr. Tichborne," said the familiar man of measures, whose chariot and blood-horses were waiting at the door, "as any young gentleman might, who was overpowered by the first pressure of finding a weighty concern upon his hands, without being properly aware of his own advantages and resources. For my own part, I shall be extremely happy to accommodate his Lordship with a thousand or two for his immediate emergencies, on reasonable interest—say twenty-five or"—watching the expression of Tichborne's eye—"even twenty per cent.—to a good customer."

"By heavens!—Presswell, you are a prime fellow," exclaimed Tichborne, leaping from the sofa on this welcome announcement.

"And if I might presume to advise, his Lordship should by no means expose himself to a meeting of the executors—a formality which will probably take place immediately after the last melancholy ceremony—without being armed against their innovations by the assistance of legal advice of his own seeking. You will excuse me, gentlemen, for this presumption" (simpering, and rolling up his morocco sample-book of shreds and patches), "but my transactions among persons of a certain rank, upon certain occasions of this melancholy nature, have given me a certain degree of experience———"

"Which you know how to turn to a *certain* account," interrupted Lord Stapylford. "Well, Presswell—and what do you advise?"

"Oh! my Lord—far be it from me—an illiterate man—your Lordship's tradesman—and totally unskilled in the intricacies of the law—to venture anything like serious advice on such a momentous affair. But I presume to remind your Lordship, and Mr. Tichborne, that there is my cousin, Nicholas Screw, of Gray's-Inn-Lane, formerly of the firm of Twig and Screw, of Lincoln's-Inn, a very rising young man, and regularly bred to the profession, who has more than once done business for gentlemen of your acquaintance. Lord Vallerhurst, as *you*, Mr. Tichborne, can particularly certify, never stirred in any matter of importance without Screw at his elbow; and I dare

not say how many units my cousin was the means of diminishing from the balance-sheet in his Lordship's favour, on an audit of the guardianship account."

"Nor how many he was the means of transferring into your rascally pocket, and his own," thought Tichborne. But maugre this unfavourable aside, he dismissed Presswell to his chariot with no darker discouragement than a promise that Lord Stapylford "would take his proposals into consideration."

Now consideration was a dose extremely nauseous to his Lordship's palate; and one which, like other patent medicines, he reserved for greater emergencies. On the present occasion he was inclined to take as little of it as possible.

"All this is a horrible bore," said he, stretching himself at full length on the sofa, after the obsequious departure of his privy-counsellor of the needle.

"All what?" said Tichborne, who conceived that a Viscounty with twenty thousand a-year could be no unwelcome inheritance at any time.

"Why, mourning—and guardians—and executors—and jointures—and a funeral—and all that sort of thing."

"Oh! the bore will be soon over—and then in becoming your own master—you will taste the sweets of your position."

"My valet and all my fellows have been to Presswell, I find, to order their mourning. They want to go down to the funeral to see what Stapylford Park is made of, but I told my friend, Mons. Sosthenes, that we should all see enough and to spare of it before we died; and that I should not be sorry if my *own* funeral were to prove the first introduction of my own *valétaille* to my family seat."

"And about this rascal of a cousin of Presswell's?—for as to the money, I take it for granted you will accept his offer!"

"Oh! the rascal is as much a matter of course as the loan. A rascal is essential to a lazy fellow like me. *I* shall want him to help me to get at my own money; and then *he* will want to help me to spend it. Besides, you know him already; and you will settle it all between you without boring me. Now do, Tich.—there's a good fellow—let fly a little note at the blackguard; and bid him come and teach me my lesson before I am called up to catechism. And now to supper—for I am devilishly hungry;— and pray let us have same Johannisberg for the Selzer water. They gave me Markbrunner last night; and by Jove, I never slept a wink."

"You don't take exercise."

"Who *can*—in town? I often think I will go into the Lifeguards, in order to be bumped and sworn into a passion in the riding-house. Fatigue is the best of opiates."

"Better come with me to Paris, and we will ride post together into Italy."

"I'll tell you what I'll do Tich.! Next spring, after Melton, we'll go abroad together, skim over France and Germany, winter in Greece; and the following year I'll come home, fight with my guardians, quarrel with my mother—marry little Minnie Willingham—settle at Stapylford—and 'live cleanly as a gentleman ought.'"

This declaration, which was made in presence of the two waiters who were laying the cloth, caused a very significant smile to pass between them.

"I say, Bob," quoth Perkins the senior waiter, as they descended the stairs together—for he was a wag, and like other men in office expected his delegate to laugh at his jokes—"I take it very few of them gemmen as Mr. Tichborne brings here and consorts with, are in anything of a condition to live cleanly and *like* gentlemen two years afterwards—eh? And don't you go to give that prime Hock to that 'ere young chap up stairs; for it's much if a young 'un such as he knows claret from Burgundy."

But to return to the fair tacticians in Seymour-street.

It was an agitating moment for the whole household when the cabriolet of Sir William Wyndham—a vehicle which would have made the illustrious Adams expire on the spot, either with laughter or disgust—drove up to the door. Lady Maria Willingham, albeit in general a very well-bred woman, and neither vociferous nor voluble in her communications with her servants, proceeded instantly to the head of the stairs, and strenuously and loudly assured her footman that she was at home—that the young ladies were at home—and that he might inform Sir William Wyndham *very* particular orders had been given for his admittance. Mademoiselle Céline, who, from the fact of Miss Eleanor's elaborate *coëffure* and *toilette*, had readily discerned that something was in the wind, was already eagerly peeping over the upper flight of stairs in order to catch a view of the lover;—at whose white corduroys and top-boots she presumed to make divers gestures of contempt; and Eleanor herself, who had settled with her mother that ample time should be given to Lady Maria and Sir William to settle the preliminaries previous to her own appearance, was quietly seated with Claudia in her dressing-room, abhorrently expressing her contempt of English country gentlemen in general, and of this same Sir William of Wyndham Park in particular. "Little does he imagine at what a risk to his own happiness he makes me his wife!" was her concluding observation.

At length the fatal quarter of an hour had marked its last moment upon Claudia's repeater;—a lapse of time pre-accorded by the family consultation, for Lady Maria to receive the blushing confessions of the Baronet, and furnish him in return with the maternal credentials which were to speed his woo-

ing. Eleanor suggested that a liberal surplus of ten minutes should be allowed to their privy-council, in case the important contingencies of pin-money and jointure should be brought under debate. "Neither my mother nor lover possess a particle of delicacy," she observed to her sister; "I have no doubt they have already embarked into the Chapter of Finance. Nay! I should not be surprised to find Lady Maria specifying the provision to be made for younger children!"

"I do not like to hear you talk thus of a man you seriously intend to marry; whom you will swear, in the sight of Heaven, to love and honour!"

"And so I *shall* love and honour him. I have a mighty respect for fools, as forming the antipodes to my own knavery. As to Sir William, I shall do more than love—I shall positively *adore* him for furnishing a peaceful refuge to my sister and myself from an unhappy and discreditable home."

In this placable disposition did Eleanor descend to the drawing-room; and having paused a moment at the door, in order to ascertain by oral inquisition that no very imminent crisis was proceeding within, she quietly entered the room, extended her hand to Sir William Wyndham, and prepared herself to talk of the weather with an air of amiable unconsciousness. She perceived that her mother looked peevish and disconcerted: and suspected that her lover had been saying either too much or too little concerning the pecuniary eligibilities of the match. But Eleanor was rather excited than daunted by the prospect of a few difficulties to be smoothed over.—"With *me* he will be everything that is liberal and conciliatory," thought she, "and when Mamma leaves the room, which I see she is preparing to do, I shall put on my royal and benign countenance of audience; and the treaty will be satisfactorily, if not speedily adjusted."

Lady Maria was, by no means, one of those common-place English mothers, who talk of "having left their handkerchief in another room," or of "having an important letter to answer by the post, which must form my excuse for leaving you so abruptly." She knew that Sir William Wyndham, of Wyndham Park, had found his way to Seymour-street expressly to make a proposal to her daughter, and she wisely judged that the sooner it was made the better. Acquiescing, therefore, in the desire she attributed to the reserved country gentleman, and somewhat clumsy suitor, that at least a ceiling and a floor should intervene between her own ears and his sentimental declaration, she left the drawing-room without peroration or apology; and proceeded to suspend poor Claudia's secret indulgencies of tearful grief, by bestowing upon her all the tediousness of her paternal hopes and fears for Eleanor's success, during the critical interval.

Eleanor Willingham, meanwhile, had seated herself on the

sofa, and drawn forth—rather in compassion to her lover's embarrassment than to her own—the identical filmy web on which her needle had made so little progress during her Calmersfield visit, or since; but which served admirably to hang over with assiduous industry, in delicate emergencies, like the present instance. But notwithstanding her seeming preoccupation, both eye and ear were sufficiently disengaged to apprize her that Sir William Wyndham had risen from his chair, and was advancing that useful piece of furniture angularly, from leg to leg, towards the sofa on which she had installed herself; and that his own musical boots were in active pursuit of the wooden quadruped. In another moment she heard nothing but the coarse wheeze of his hard breathing beside her work-box. He had taken up a pair of scissors, and was beginning to clip off minute sections of an *allumette* which he had unconsciously withdrawn from the inkstand.

Eleanor now peeped slily over her embroidery, and observed that her future lord looked as auspiciously sheepish as any victim destined to surrender its fleece at the Holkham spring meeting;—so mute, indeed, and so protracted were his deliberations, that she began to doubt whether she was not called upon to recommence her attack upon the weather. At length he hemmed his last hem, and began.

"If I were not fully aware from general report, Miss Eleanor, of the amiableness of your disposition, I should hardly have presumed to wait upon you this morning with my present views and intentions."

Sir William paused—drew breath—took out a large yellow silk pocket-handkerchief, and honoured it with audible use, and elaborate refolding; and while Eleanor plied her delicate needle with redoubled, and almost angry activity, replaced it in his pocket. This measure having necessitated a partial rise from his chair, formed an excuse for a tedious resettlement of position; and on the strength of his preambular eloquence, Sir William already presumed to reseat himself three inches nearer towards the sofa.

"I conceive, Miss Eleanor, that your own discernment, as well as your Mamma's experienced hints, must have acquainted you that a man of my easy condition in life naturally looks towards a suitable marriage as the only measure necessary to complete his happiness; and that having so settled his views, he does not relinquish them on a slight discouragement. For my own part, I do not hesitate to confess that my affections have long been engaged; and that in my earnest trust to form a permanent alliance with the Willingham family, I gratify at once my pride, the wishes of my friends, and my own tenderest attachment."

He made a tremendous abbreviation of the *allumette* at this euphonious close; and Eleanor felt that the respect with

which he enveloped his compliments, demanded the civility of a low bow in return. Gratified by the encouraging recognition, he bowed again. "Plague take the man!" thought the fair sempstress; "this Noodle-and-Doodle-scene of compliments, will endure till mid-night; and Mamma's patience will never last out his prosing."

"The first time I ever set eyes on Miss Eleanor Willingham," resumed the Baronet, "I saw something in her countenance which encouraged me to form the most charming, the most exciting hopes of future happiness; and I still presume to trust that I shall not find myself disappointed."

Eleanor looked up from her work, and performed a sort of semi-serious, but very encouraging smile.

"Of my family, Miss Willingham, I flatter myself I need say little or nothing to the daughter of a brother Baronet of my own county. The Wyndhams, of Wyndham Park, Ma'am, have represented that county in nine various Parliaments; and when I add that our patent dates from the restoration of the Stuarts, I trust I infer all that is necessary, both for our own loyalty and the respectable antiquity of the title. It is well known, however, that a Wyndham commanded an archery brigade at Agincourt; and that Sir Peter de Windhaume was lord of the buttery to Edward the First.

He paused—but *not* "for a reply." And the moderation of his wishes on this score was highly acceptable to Eleanor, who was now convulsed by suppressed laughter.

"With respect to fortune, Miss Eleanor, I need not, I fancy, be more explicit. Long as has been your residence on the Continent, your former familiarity with the environs of Heddeston Court can scarcely have left you unacquainted with the extent and importance of the Wyndham property. You remember Manning Wood, Ma'am?"

Eleanor, in order to avoid a minute topographical sketch, bowed acquiescingly, although she knew about as much of it as of that of Birnam.

"Well, Miss Willingham—every acre of land, as the crow flies from Mannington Wood to Undercross Mill, was formerly included in Wyndham Chase: and even now, excepting the farms of Pear Tree Holme and Innertree, the former of which was taken into the Knatchbull family in the reign of William the Third, by a marriage between Sir Marmaduke Knatchbull and Bridget Wyndham, third daughter to the second Sir John—and the latter exchanged between Sir Claude Willingham and my grandfather, early in the latter reign, by way of sealing some electioneering compact—I believe I may say that there grows not a stick of timber on that ground, Ma'am, which is not lawfully my own;—always under respect to the statute of entail, and necessary impeach-

ment of waste, included in the limitation of the original title-deeds."

Eleanor longed to tell him that in these

Nice quiddits of the law,
Good faith she was no wiser than a daw.

But, on second thoughts, she deferred his election to the honour of becoming her *butt*, until after the marriage ceremony.

"Besides the Kentish property, Ma'am, I have a small, but compact estate in Wiltshire, called Camberley Lodge, at present let on lease to a worthy family of the name of Smyth;—*very* respectable people, who spell their name in the respectable way, with a y—although I should have been better pleased if they had also a right to the final e, like the Irish Smythes;—*that*, you know, Miss Eleanor, would have stamped them at once of the aristocracy; and it is always pleasant to have one's tenants properly appreciated and visited in the county. However, their lease will be out in nine years; and any lady who honours me with her hand, shall then have the option of retaining Camberley. It has its advantages, Ma'am—it is not above thirteen miles from Bath."

All this was too much for Eleanor's gravity; and she was forced to drop her thimble, in order that Sir William Wyndham's attention might be diverted from herself by a search after this golden implement of defence, which she had taken care should roll towards an opposite corner of the room.

"As to my Northumberland estates," resumed Sir William, gravely bowing as he presented the recovered thimble to its half-suffocated owner, "I must own, to my shame, that I have never yet visited them. I know, however, that they are entered into my rent-roll at a valuation of seventeen hundred and twenty-three pounds and a fraction per annum; and that they are said, in the Reverend Mr. Dodderkin's history of the county, to have been presented by King Athelstan to one Gryce Windorme, or Windholme, in recompense of service done against the Picts."

"I am astonished," said Eleanor, "that your curiosity has never induced you to inspect so ancient a possession of your illustrious progenitors."

"I reserve the pleasure, Ma'am, as part of a bridal excursion which I sometimes indulge myself with the happiness of contemplating—an excursion, Miss Willingham, of which I cannot but believe that the proximity depends entirely on yourself."

Eleanor thought so too; and was only puzzled by the doubt thus thrown on the subject.

"Sir Joseph Willingham, Miss Eleanor, is a very respectable man."

"*We* have every reason to respect my uncle, Sir William; and we consider him fortunate in your friendship."

"And Lady Willingham;—her birth and education considered, Lady Willingham is an excellent woman. One can hardly believe her to have been a Bodham, and bred in the marshes.

"Lady Willingham has been quite a mother to my young sister," said Eleanor; "and we esteem her accordingly."

"And Mr. Willingham is a young man of considerable promise. I look forward to the period when Charles Willingham will represent the County of Kent!"

"We have not seen my cousin since he was grown up; but we hear of him from every one as a person of great abilities and excellent qualities."

There now remained but one member of the Heddeston Court family to place under discussion; and Eleanor, who was well aware how matters had formerly stood between Mary and Sir William Wyndham, felt rather nervous on perceiving that he had hunted himself into a *cul de sac;*—she was curious, however, to observe in what way a man so totally unskilled in diplomacy would burrow himself out of the scrape. But Sir William had no thoughts of any such nefarious modes of escape.

"And Mary—Mary Willingham!"—said he, in a nervous plaintive tone.

Eleanor almost started.

"She has a great regard for *you*, Miss Eleanor;—a very high opinion of your talents and judgment. It was from her representations that I first learned to estimate you as you deserve to be estimated."

Eleanor was not Missish enough to quarrel with the mode, where the fact had proved so satisfactory to her feelings.

"My cousin is very kind and very partial," said she graciously. "Excepting my own sister, I have no friend on whom I more thoroughly rely. I am willing to hope that in future life a considerable portion of our time may be passed together."

"Ah! Miss Eleanor!—if I could but hope that it would pass at Wyndham Park."

This was a stupendous advance; but still the proposition was scarcely sufficiently interrogative.

"Have I any chance of interesting you in my favour?"—said he, in an agitated stammer.

"Our acquaintance, Sir William, has been, at present, of such brief duration; and matrimony is so decisive—so very decisive a step!"

"Lord! Ma'am—my character is known in half an hour;—I am the most off-hand fellow in the universe—plain English, and no disguise;—what you see me once, you may see

me for ever. Besides, I am pretty well known—something of a public character, and my light has never been hid under a bushel. My constituents—my neighbours—the members of the Wyndham hunt—and of half a dozen of the best clubs in town—any of them will tell you what I am."

"Believe me, Sir William, I have hitherto heard nothing respecting you that has not been perfectly satisfactory."

"That is very handsomely said, and I thank you from the bottom of my heart," said Sir William, somewhat affected, and with a varying complexion, which betrayed stronger emotions than Eleanor had hitherto given him credit for. He rose and went to the window, and came back after a minute's absence, with twinkling eyes but firmer resolution.

"Oh! Miss Eleanor—take pity on a very unhappy man! What are the Kentish estates, or the Wiltshire or Northumberland property—what avails an old Baronetcy and a seat in Parliament, when one has nothing but a solitary home to resort to?—Oh! Miss Eleanor! intercede for me with your cousin—exert your kind influence in my favour; for, by Jove! the day that Mary Willingham marries another man will seal my death-warrant."

Absolutely petrified with amazement, Eleanor was too much thrown off her guard to find one word in reply; Sir William, totally engrossed by his own feelings, did not notice her discomfiture, but vehemently pursued his apostrophe.

"It is now fifteen years since I first knew Mary, Miss Eleanor. When you and your sister were still shut up in the nursery at Heddeston Court, I used to visit the Rectory with my late father; and there was Mary Willingham—a gentle, patient, generous girl, always ready to bear with my schoolboy violence, and admit me to a share of her toys and pleasures. She grew up—and every body said she was not pretty, nor graceful, nor so accomplished, may be, as other young ladies; but Mary always seemed pretty to *me*;—her eyes were so meek, and her voice so gentle, and her thoughts so kind for every one else, and so little for herself, that I have never ceased to love and worship her.—I do not mind speaking the truth, Miss Eleanor, even to another lady;—let me, therefore, confess to you that she has long known all this;—twice I have offered myself to her acceptance, and twice she has refused me."

"So I had already heard," said Eleanor, faintly; observing that some sort of answer was necessary; while her own thoughts were wholly occupied in framing one to meet the eager curiosity of Lady Maria.

"She says she has a great respect for me—a great regard;—but that she does not love me with the preference necessary to the happiness of a married life."

"That is so like one of Mary's sententious formalities!" burst involuntarily from the lips of Eleanor.

"In short I can no longer hope that she will deign to listen to *me* on that subject."

Eleanor was furious with indignation, at the idea of her poor, spiritless, dowdy cousin Mary's *deigning* to listen to the very man she had *herself* determined to marry on the very slightest proposal.

"But if *you*, Miss Eleanor—you whom she loves and honours—would kindly interest yourself in my favour; if you would only represent to her that I require no preference—that I demand no love at her hands but such as I may hereafter win by the devotion of my whole affection and whole existence to her happiness—perhaps, Madame, you might succeed in obtaining some slight concession—some distant prospect of a determination to think more kindly of my views."

"Sir William!" replied Miss Willingham, with as imposing an air as she could manage to assume, and rising from her seat in decided token of dismissal, "you must be well aware that, at my age, I cannot undertake a task of so much family-importance, without consulting Mamma. I promise, in the mean time, to think over all you have said; and I need not assure you that you will find the whole family predisposed in your favour. Whether or not we shall ever become cousins, I will hardly venture to predict," continued Eleanor, graciously extending her hand by way of adieu; "but I trust we shall always remain friends; and that your visits to Seymour-street, thus once commenced, they will be frequently renewed."

She rang the bell for his cabriolet with the easy dignity of an ambassadress; and poor Sir William, without at all comprehending his own position, or the alteration of Eleanor's manner towards him, found his creaking boots in the hall at least a quarter of an hour sooner than he had intended. Lady Maria, equally startled by this premature announcement of departure, hastened down into the drawing-room in dismay.

"Good heavens, Eleanor! what has taken the man away so soon? Surely you have not been so mad as to refuse him?"

"He gave me no opportunity for so magnanimous an instance of self-denial."

"Why, what has he been saying and doing for the last half-hour?"

"Fulfilling the best purposes of his yea-nay existence—boring and prosing. You must be patient, Mamma; 'a snail cannot be matched against Eclipse.'—It was too much to insist on a proposal on the very first visit; but trust to me that everything shall be finally arranged to your satisfaction."

Lady Maria was too much disappointed to bear even the *word* satisfaction with patience. She was, at the same time, too well aware of Eleanor's determination of character to irritate her by further parley; and was forced to content herself with a sulky fit in her own dressing-room, enlivened by the interlude of a domestic tornado, vented upon the innocent Mademoiselle Céline.

With Claudia, meanwhile, Eleanor scarcely dared be more explicit, on the subject of Sir William Wyndham's intentions, than with her mother. She had rashly promised her so much, that she could not immediately undertake the task of undeceiving her expectations. She suffered more, indeed, in the prospect of making her sister unhappy, than in that of making Lady Maria angry; and she was compelled to trust, like all imprudent people, to *time* for the re-adjustment of her difficulties. It was from Lady Robert Lorton that she chiefly expected assistance;—the person of all others on whom she least relied for counsel, and on whom she most sparingly bestowed her own confidence.

CHAPTER XX.

Deceive no more thyself and me,
Deceive not better hearts than mine;
Ah! should'st thou, whither wouldst thou flee
From agony and shame like thine?—
And if there be a wrath divine,
A pang beyond this fleeting breath,
E'en now all future hope resign,
Such thoughts are guilt, such guilt is death.

BYRON.

"ARE you going to the *déjeuné* at Wimbledon to-morrow?" inquired Lady Barringhurst of Mrs. Grandison, as they met in the vestibule of Lady Robert Lorton's boudoir, at the close of a sultry July morning.

"Of course!—what would be the use of remaining in town, with no other society than the strawberry-women; and with nothing but water-carts moving in the dusty streets?"

"And Lady Robert?"

"I have been employing all my eloquence in vain. She sets off for Spa on Thursday; and says that it would disarrange her travelling apparatus to appear in full dress the last day. Do what you can to persuade her; for without *her* presence, the whole thing will be a failure," cried Mrs. Grandison, flying down to the britschka which was waiting to convey her to Kensington Gardens and Lord Cosmo Somerset;

while Lady Barringhurst proceeded with her usual listless placidity towards the fairy cell, wherein Lady Robert Lorton, after her recent adieus, had already reinstated herself at full length upon a silken sofa, with a French novel in her hands. She entered unannounced, and quietly seated herself beside her friend.

"I am quite overcome with despair," said Lucy with a languid smile. "Grandison tells me you will have nothing to say to the *déjeuné* to-morrow, dear love. Surely you cannot contemplate so base a desertion?—We shall all be there;—these silly boys have planned the fête solely in honour of our little coterie—Lord Cosmo for the sake of Bessy Grandison's bright eyes; Tichborne for mine; and little Stapylford in honour of your tiny Ladyship's attractions;—and it would really be an act of infamy to play truant, after making them expend a year's income on peaches and macédoines."

"I fear that poor Tichborne's income would not feast a sparrow for half a day; and you really ought to blush, dearest Lucy, for encouraging him to do the impossible, in hopes of exciting attention on your part, such as you never intend to bestow!"

"How can you calculate the extent of my liberality?" said Lady Barringhurst, justifying the admonitions of her friend by a vivid blush. "Depend on it Tichborne will never ruin himself for *my* sake, either with or without reward. My gentle coz is like the miseltoe, which miraculously retains an unchanging verdure, though springing out of a black and ruined branch. As the song runs, '*Il sait tout, il fait tout, il voit tout, il est partout!*'—and all the while *has* nothing! I am persuaded that his own allowance does not find him in Eau de Cologne or his valet in shoestrings; yet he has always ample funds at his command."

"Inasmuch as, like the miseltoe to which you so aptly compare him, he is a mere parasite plant; drawing his vital powers from the life of others. It is nothing less than odious to see Mr. Tichborne, and Lord Cosmo, and Henry Mulgrave, and the rest of the tribe, living as they do on this poor foolish Lord Stapylford;—who is borrowing money at fifty per cent. and disgracing himself by all sorts of excesses, before his father is cold in his grave."

"And exactly *as* his father did before him. My dearest love, I should say that you were growing a savage prude, did you not wield the cudgels so furiously in defence of your '*Narcisetto, Adoncino d'amor.*'"

"Not *mine*, believe me! It suits Tichborne and his gang to persuade their silly dupe that he is desperately in love with me; in order that he may project *déjeunés* and water-parties for their own amusement, and for the furtherance of their own *liaisons*."

"Oh! fie!—you are quite censorious!—*Sur quelle herbe as tu marchée aujourd'hui?*"

"*Sur une pensée, chère Lucie.*"

"*Et quelle est elle?*"

"That we have been all wandering on the brink of a precipice, and that *you* are still wandering on the brink of the abyss."

"This horrible Spa journey of yours has given you a fit of blue devils, or a fit of misanthropy!—or have you been weeping at the Lock Chapel, or mysticising with Mrs. Fry?"

"Neither, I assure you."

"Or perhaps you are pining after the Lisborough strawberry-leaves?—I fear you cannot forgive the Duke's marriage."

"I cannot indeed!—for I like Lisborough too well to wish to see him made unhappy and contemptible for life;—nor can I be satisfied with his measures, so long as I have Claudia Willingham's wasting figure and tremulous voice constantly before me."

"My dear creature, you have too exalted a sensibility. Every girl grows thin at the close of the season. Living from April till July on sighs and syllabubs, hope and sponge biscuits, is a bad regimen to encourage *embonpoint*; and young ladies who pass their time in improving their minds and morals by studying Madame Cottin—as you are doing now—and their beauty by waltzing five nights out of seven from midnight till daybreak—have very little chance of escaping the charge of a consumption, if it should please some flirting Duke to marry in the interim. The world says that Claudia Willingham is dying of vexation at the loss of Calmersfield; and that *you* are accompanying her to Spa, at once to escape Lord Robert's growls for the forfeiture of his heirship presumptive, and acquit your own conscience of any active share in the fair Claudia's decease."

"The world speaks as usual, with a forked adder's tongue.—I am going to Spa simply because I am weary of my mill-wheel at home, and because I want the stimulus of novelty and travel to keep me awake. You and I, Lucy, and other giddy-pated fools, who have ruined their palates by over excitement——"

"Now dearest!—let me pray you to remember that 'the dog-star rages!' Do not encroach too far on my patience with your predications, or I shall take pity on myself, and call the carriage."

> By heavens! you stir not!
> I must be heard—I must have leave to speak,

Exclaimed Lady Robert Lorton in a more cheerful tone, as

she threw away her book, and clasped her arms round her friend.

"Are you mad this morning?" said the amazed Lady Barringhurst, wholly unprepared for this vehement histrionic exertion.

"Most methodically so, dear Lucy.—I am going to leave you for two or three months—to leave you, love, surrounded by mischiefs and moral evils."

"For my part, I can discern *no* method in your madness;—You leave me surrounded by my husband and children;—and if you are pleased to designate *them* as mischiefs and moral evils, I can only say that you are more frank than polite."

"And by what *other* human beings, dear Lucy, are you encompassed?"

"You put me to a vast trouble of consideration!—what other *human* beings?—But my kinsfolk and acquaintance—my men-servants and my maid-servants."

"You are trifling with me."

"It is the first time I ever saw *you* serious."

"I am discontented with myself, with you, and with many whom I tender less dearly."

"Madame de Staël says, in one of her beautiful explosions of eloquence, that a degree of solemnity attends every journey commencing with a sea-passage. From your air and gravity of speech this morning, I opine that Lord Robert has condemned you to invade the Netherlands by way of Ostend;—and that the prospect of twelve hours in a steam-packet has reduced you to this matter-of-fact condition of body and mind."

"We *do* sail for Ostend, for we have the Admiralty yacht; but believe me there is nothing in my projected excursion which does not promise me unmixed gratification. The Willinghams and the Villa Armagnanos are the pleasantest companions imaginable for such an expedition; and the set already assembled at Spa is excellent. But *you*, Lucy—you who are about to brave this dangerous crisis of the season, in London or at Wilmount—it is *you* who make me uneasy at quitting England. At this time of the year people have flirted themselves into a most perilous degree of familiarity;—their mode of life has settled itself into habits of daily and hourly meeting, and their 'whereabout' has become a matter of the most positive anticipation."

"So much the better!—it saves one an infinity of trouble and explanation to have those things properly understood. In May, I always find myself bored to death with 'shall you be at Lady Jane's to-morrow night?'—'at which door do you order your carriage?'—or 'at what o'clock do you generally ride?'—In July it is all an understood thing."

"And 'at what hour does Barringhurst go down to the

House?'—when does *that arrangement* begin to be tacitly understood?"—inquired Lady Robert very significantly.

"Alas! never!" replied Lucy, rather abashed. "For Barringhurst's movements, like your own whimsicalities, are not to be calculated upon.—And so you are really afraid that we are all going to be too happy in this deserted town of London?—you fancy that, seeing a fine crop of grass springing in the streets, we shall emulate the dangerous Arcadian *naïvetés* of the '*Bella età di oro.*'"

"I only fear you will find that the practice of the season makes perfect in more arts than an apt collision of persons and places. The world, after talking 'an infinite deal of nothing' for three idle months, grows bold in the appropriation of names;—and Scandal, intoxicated with endless potations, seizes on surrounding objects with the unsteady hand of inebriety, and defiles by many a random touch."

"My dear child! you are positively as metaphorical as the Vicomte d'Arlincourt!"

"*Shall* I speak plainly?—Nay! I both must and will; for you already look too conscious not to increase my apprehensions. My dear Lucy! all London is talking of your intimacy with that scapegrace of a cousin of yours."

"With Tichborne?—of course!—He is on the happiest terms of friendship both with Barringhurst and all my family; and as I am neither very old nor very ugly, the malicious majority of people in society are enabled to invent a scandal, whereby they trust the comfort of our mutual position may be destroyed."

"Of *yours*—but not of his!—His position is secure in his own heartless egotism. Let whatever evil befal *you*, he will always find some other house to dine in, or opera-box to lounge in, or villa to raise his violets and strawberries; while *yourself*, if once wounded by——"

"You are really too ill-natured!" interrupted Lady Barringhurst, with a heightened complexion, and with something more nearly approaching towards an angry feeling than she had ever experienced in her life.—"Why should you attribute feelings and follies to me, of which *you* hold *yourself* absolutely guiltless? You know that I am very happy in my home;—that I love Barringhurst and my children as much as I can be at the trouble of loving any human thing;—that I never voluntarily injured man or woman. And why should you suppose that for the sake of Tichborne—whom I like about as well as my bay mare, or my new harp, or my conservatory, or any other inanimate object which serves to increase my stock of amusements—why should you suppose that to swell the selfish vanity of a good-looking, ill-acting, mere man of pleasure, I would sacrifice my happiness, mortal and immortal—renounce my home and children—and expose

myself to the sneers of society, and the reprobation of heaven?—My dear Lady Robert! you should learn to judge more charitably of your friends, whether as regards their understanding or their principles!"

"Now Lucy—*be* just—*be* candid with me in your turn!—Have I insinuated that you contemplate any such sacrifice?—Do you imagine that *any* woman calmly contemplates her own destruction,—or that the incautious swimmer, about to venture beyond his depth, exclaims 'there runs the river which will destroy me!—and lo! I dare my destiny?' No—no!—I do not even suppose that you are aware of regarding Mr. Tichborne with a dangerous preference; but you have accustomed yourself to his society and to his entire devotion;—his flatteries have become a necessary aliment; and were Lord Barringhurst to overhear and take umbrage at the whispers of society, and exact his exile from your house, I am satisfied that his absence would be a source of deep regret to your feelings, and perhaps of rebellion against your husband's authority."

"Certainly!—I should feel that Barringhurst was acting like a fool, and consider it my duty to nip his absurdity in the bud. I most assuredly would *not* resign my cousin Tichborne's friendship at his instigation. Were I *guilty*, I could make no humbler sacrifice."

"Were you guilty, he would not ask it;—he would drive you from his house. But *being* innocent, he has surely a right to require that you should disarm suspicion by foregoing a very intimate connexion with a man of very indifferent character."

"You will make me fall in love with poor Tichborne in right earnest, out of a spirit of contradiction," said Lady Barringhurst, sportively. "How I wish the world would trouble itself as little with my affairs as I interfere with those of others!"

"My dearest Lucy!—I interfere no further than to place you on your guard. I am going away for some months, and with a persuasion that I leave you in the hands of those who are interested to work you evil. I give you my faithful word that malicious eyes are upon you, and eager to misinterpret your proceedings; but alas! it is not these which my affection for you induces me to dread."

"You seem to limit your apprehensions to the wickedness of my raging lion of a cousin."

"Still less—for against *him* you are already guarded.—Every woman has an instinctive mistrust of her lover."

"Neither Sylla nor Charybdis?—Explain!—explain!—for you are beginning to excite my curiosity.—Where lies the sunken rock of my future perdition?"

"In Bessy Grandison's sophistry!—There exists not half

the danger in the machinations of twenty libertines, than is concealed within the pernicious maxims of one dissolute woman."

Lady Barringhurst reseated herself, and assumed a patient attitude, as if better inclined to listen to the remonstrances of her friend.

"I was myself formerly fascinated by Mrs. Grandison's wonderful powers of conversation;—I preferred her to almost all my intimate friends—even to you. There was a buoyant gaiety in her discourse—an originality in her turns of expression, mingled with a carelessness or defiance of received opinions, which rendered her a most welcome resource against the monotonous routine of society. The excitement of her piquant vivacity soon became essential to my amusement;—I introduced her into my own circle, into yours—and for some time she was careful to retain, among us all, that decent reserve of manner by which she had originally tempered her gaiety, and won her way to my esteem. It was in Lisborough's favour that this was first forfeited. He—by nature the gravest and most listless of mortals—was intoxicated by the varying charm of her lively sallies—and Bessy, in her turn, exaggerated her own attractions by 'gilding refined gold,' and indulging in every possible indiscretion of speech. I saw all this—but I regarded it only as a breach of good breeding and good taste; for knowing that the Grandisons were *nouveaux riches*, and extremely ambitious of buying their road towards the fashionable world, I concluded her to be aware of the extent of Lisborough's estate in that ethereal territory—of the value of his single suffrage—and therefore anxious to ensure it at any risk. I was persuaded that when once she had established herself as one of the presiding deities of Lisborough house, she would resume her former lively, but not unfeminine *naïveté* of address."

"You did not perceive that the assumption had been in the first instance;—that you had been the dupe."

"So little, that while all the world was inveighing against her undisguised familiarity with Lisborough, *I* was constantly encouraging the business, and bringing them together; in order that she might become surfeited with ducal dignities and subside once more in my friend Bessy Grandison. Soon, however, I discovered other instances of bad taste in her habits;—I saw that she was not naturally 'of us and of our company,'—that she was always restless in our little reunions, languishing after greater displays, and seeking after fresh conquests. This destroyed the harmony of our *far niente* association, and by degrees my preference of her society was moderated into indifference."

"A change which herself and others did you the honour of attributing to a jealousy of her ascendancy over the Duke."

"She never *had* any real ascendancy over Lisborough. He was amused and attracted by her brilliancy of conversation, as he might have been by the efforts of any other charlatan; but he is, in truth, so innately and intensely aristocratic, that he always felt revolted by *parvenu* contact of any kind; yes!—even in the guise of a beautiful woman. But I own that her conduct respecting him *was* the first origin of my disgust;—such lengths as she went to secure his notice, and appear with him in public in his opera-box, or phaeton, or wherever the mighty foolhood of the world were gathered together! But this was not her worst offence, in my eyes."

"What more could she do—unless to interfere in some flirtation of her own?"

"No! she was pleased to move my indignation by a still more contemptible manœuvre. Like every other giddy married woman, Bessy overrated her own powers; and ventured to put lance in rest against the attractions of younger and more innocent rivals; and—"

"You do not mean to assert," interrupted Lady Barringhurst, "that an unmarried girl—whatever her beauty—whatever her innocence—has any chance of victory in a struggle with an experienced matron, who does not scruple to put forth all her powers of fascination, legitimate or lawless?"

"Indeed I do!—In the first blush of such a connexion, the married woman would doubtless obtain the preference. Such a Circe is mistress of arts which, for a certain time, assume an unlimited influence over her lover's mind;—but it does not last, Lucy!—you know that it does not!—The very first advantage obtained by her younger and purer rival, is decisive;—there is a repose—a holy quietude about the affections of an inexperienced girl, to which the man of pleasure flies for refreshment after the perils and exactions of a less hallowed attachment."

Lady Barringhurst sighed.

"And this, Mrs. Grandison soon found to her cost. After opposing the Duke of Lisborough's inclination for Claudia Willingham in every possible way, and thwarting them on all occasions—she no sooner decided that he had made up his mind to marry, and that Claudia was about to become mistress of Calmersfield, than she began paying her court in the most abject way to the whole family."

"That, I suppose, is the Willingham version of the affair."

"Far from it!—They were too much engrossed by their own plans and plots, to take the least notice of hers. It was *I* alone who, blushing for her as my former friend, detected and despised her meanness."

"Poor Bessy!—It would have been hard to give up her

own particular duke at a moment's warning, after paying for him so dearly."

"Pray hear me out with patience!—in the midst of all her toadying and cringing—just when she was making love to the whole Willingham family, from Mrs. De Vesci's parrot to the future Duchess, she caught a glimpse of Charlotte Grayfield's counter-mine, in time to turn her apostacy to account. Lady Anastasia, she knew, would be a dupe far better fitted to her purposes than the daughter of an artful woman of the world, such as Lady Maria Willingham; so instantly deserting to the enemy, she persuaded Lisborough that all London was laughing at him for being caught by a decided match-hunter; and that the Willinghams had followed him to England with a casting-net in their hands, ready prepared to throw over the finest gudgeon of the river Thames!"

"But can you believe that she said and did all this?"

"Without the least shadow of a doubt! Lisborough never approached me at that period without some ill-natured history respecting my friends, nor without candidly giving up his authority! and you are well aware that he is not sufficiently imaginative to invent either the one or the other. However, I will even grant her absolution for her sins in that adventure. It served to develope her true character; and I have since learned to estimate the full extent of its duplicity."

"You are alluding to her flirtation with Lord Cosmo?"

"I cannot think of it with patience!—Scarcely had she put the seal to her treachery towards the poor Willinghams, and turned the observation of her leisure upon our little coterie, than she perceived the good understanding existing between Lord Cosmo Somerset and little Barbara Desmond!—for Barbara is the most *naïve*, frank, infantine creature in the world, and did not even attempt to conceal her preference. We all saw it; and even Lady Desmond herself, who could not regard a younger brother as a brilliant match for her daughter, was moved by Lady Barbara's confiding and visible attachment to overlook his deficiencies.—I positively lose my patience when I think of it all;—for in *my* opinion, Bessy Grandison's malevolent and gratuitous interference in this instance was scarcely less flagrant than Satan's incursion upon the innocent happiness of Paradise."

"I was at Brighton when the affair commenced; and having left Lord Cosmo in all the sublime and beautiful enthusiasm of a matrimonial attachment for Lady Barbara, I find him on my return a despairing lover at the feet of Mrs. Grandison.—But how is *she* accountable for his inconstancy?"

"By having courted him from his allegiance. Yes! absolutely courted him!—A boy of his age was enchanted to

find a woman of her fashion and beauty sighing at his feet: and without one compunctious sigh, he left that fine generous-hearted noble-minded creature, Barbara, to break her heart or her neck, as circumstances might invite her."

"You have made out a strong—an iniquitous case against our friend; and with the evidence so grievously against her, I can scarcely conceive how you have since been able to endure her society with patience."

"Believe me I have borne it most *im*-patiently, both for the Willinghams' sakes—for little Desmond's, and for my own. But I have no more courage to irritate a truly mischievous woman, than to attack some rabid beast of prey. I could not overmaster her, and must necessarily become her victim. Even Lady Desmond, with all her maternal indignation rife in her heart, bears and forbears with Mrs. Grandison; and I am fain to follow her example, in the certainty that were I to acknowledge my insight into her character, she would lay siege to Lord Robert, undermine all my happiness, nor rest so long as one stone remained upon another of my peaceful home."

"You make me shudder!—and, now tell me, for the love of goodness, why you suspect her of being *my* enemy; and in what manner my undoing could tend to her advantage?"

"She has tact enough to have perceived that she has long been losing ground among us; yet is weak enough to estimate that ground at far more than its actual value. Lisborough has other objects to occupy his attention;—Lady Grayfield having gained her end, despises her tool; the Desmonds fly from her as from a basilisk—and even Wallace, and Wolryche, and Mulgrave and Tichborne, while they adore her wit and beauty, and old Grandison's dinners, cannot disguise from her their consciousness of her treachery.—Now although I believe her to have persuaded herself into a passion—a Grandison passion, be it understood—for Lord Cosmo, even he does not suffice to occupy her active mind, or to maintain her slippery footing in the world of fashion."

"Certainly not;—a *female* buoy is necessary among the billows of the *beau monde*."

"No sooner therefore did she find herself sinking, than she clung to me.—And in what manner do you suppose she attempted to frame a cable for her new anchor?"

"I cannot guess."

"By branding me with her own infamy! She tried to allure me within the boundaries of the quarantine ground, in order that being infected, I might share her penance and her company! She attempted to persuade me that Stapylford was dying for me; she had already deluded *him* into playing off the impertinent airs of a lover in my behalf; and by constantly making him the hero of her conversation as an *aima-*

ble poltsson'—a '*joli petit page*'—'*Cherubino*,' or some other absurd appellation, she fancied she should end by interesting me in favour of a boy of nineteen, 'with all his *blushing* honours thick upon him.'"

"He is certainly a very elegant young man——"

"To captivate some elegant young lady, fresh from her sonatas and her French grammar. As to me, I am too idle to be at the trouble of loving any body but my husband;—and as to pretty Pages, either in general or particular—I could see the whole race drowned in milk of roses without a pang. However, Bessy's attempt served to put me on my guard; and when I saw her playing a similar and a more dangerous game in *your* habitation, I learnt to detest *her*, and to tremble for you."

"Yet this is the very first warning you have hazarded!"

"Lucy—Lucy! even now—how ungraciously have you received my remonstrances."

"I was wrong to be so captious," said Lady Barringhurst, affectionately extending her hand towards her friend.

"Besides, I felt re-assured by the excellence of your own heart and principles—by your affection for Barringhurst and for your children."

"These might suffice to guard against guilt, but not against the imprudence which assumes its semblance."

"And therefore on the eve of my departure, I have ventured to open your eyes. One of the principal objects of my expedition to Spa has been to avoid all the jealousies attending the Lisborough marriage; but I have it still more at heart to break off my connexion with Mrs. Grandison, and without the scandal of a rupture. Beware, dear Lucy, how you place yourself too deeply in her power to become free again by a similar effort."

Lady Barringhurst re-assumed her attitude of uneasy meditation.

"Now own the truth!" continued Lady Robert, her cheeks flushed with friendly eagerness, "has she not already done her utmost to urge your defiance of the opinion of the world?"

Lady Barringhurst smiled.

"Has she not laboured on all occasions to placé you under the observation of the public in Tichborne's society? Has she not frequently left you to a tête-à-tête, in your drives, and rides, and walks, without any voluntary acquiescence on your part?"

"She has, indeed!—you are perfectly familiar with her manœuvres, which I had hitherto believed accidental as my own actions."

"Experience of her plans towards myself has made me a mighty tactician in such affairs. One thing more; has she

not contrived that Tichborne should accompany you to-morrow to the breakfast ?"

"I believe we were to have been a *partie quarrée* in her barouche. Tichborne and I, herself and Lord Cosmo."

"And Lord Barringhurst, no doubt, was to ride down, at her instigation, with Sir Comyne Wallace, or Wolryche ;—so that you could not possibly have made your entrance to the fête upon his arm ?"

"Precisely !—and how, even warned as I am, can I evade this peril ?—By your own account it is dangerous to provoke her malice. Dearest Lady Robert !—sacrifice your inclinations in my favour ;—come down with me to Wimbledon ; and as your horses have already left town, I shall have an excellent excuse for using my own carriage on your account."

"I will oblige you with pleasure, even at the risk of appearing as capricious and fantastic as an ape in the eyes of the whole world—or at least of that minute fraction of it which is at present remaining in London.—But I must exact one condition in return."

"Name it—and command my compliance."

"That you do not make yourself conspicuous at the breakfast with Tichborne as your knight ;—and that you do not invite him to stay with you at Wilmount during my absence from England."

Lady Barringhurst paused for a moment.

"I scarcely dare engage myself by a promise in either instance ; for with the best inclinations"—

"My dear Lucy—you are well aware it is by the spirit rather than by the letter of the vow, that I wish to fetter your actions."

"Well then—trust to me in all honour ; and at three o'clock to-morrow I will call for you to accompany me to Wimbledon. Satisfy yourself that I will henceforth avoid Tichborne's *exclusive* society as much as circumstances will admit."

CHAPTER XXI.

But *laissez aller!*—Knights and dames I sing,
Such as the times may furnish. 'Tis a flight
Which seems at first to need no lofty wing,
Plum'd by Longinus or the Stagyrite:
The difficulty lies in colouring,
(Keeping the due proportions still in sight)
With nature, manners that are artificial,
And rendering *general*, that which is especial.

The difference is that in the days of old
Men made the manners—manners now make men;
Primed like a flock and fleeced too in their fold,
At least nine, and a ninth beside of ten.
Now this at all events must render cold
Your writers, who must either draw again
Days better drawn before, or else assume
The present with their common-place costume.

BYRON.

The following day was more than propitious. No one could have believed, in observing the filmy clouds which attempered the sunshine—and the balmy air which shook the fragrance from the blossomed shrubs—that a *fête champêtre* was in agitation. As the Ducca de Villa Armagnano observed, "*Le tems étoit à commande;—ni pluie; ni soleil—ni vent—ne ménagoit les ailes argentées du Bonheur!*"

Now the little billet in which Lady Barringhurst announced to her dangerous friend her change of plans for the morning, had arrived too late and too unexpectedly to be counterplotted by Mrs. Grandison's manœuvres; but the consequences of the altered plan were far from being so auspicious to the enjoyment of the parties concerned, as was the temperament of the atmosphere. Lord Cosmo, "for the sake of appearances," was compelled to vacate his seat in the barouche, and drive down Mr. Tichborne in his cabriolet; and Mrs. Grandison, thus miserably defrauded of her due, and having moreover contrived to manœuvre her own husband into another party, had only to choose between the air of desertion occasioned by a solitary drive, and the society of any accidental female bore, in need of a conveyance to Wimbledon.

She had serious thoughts of overlooking the coolness subsisting between herself and the Willinghams; although they had overtly marked their sense of her evil-dealing towards them by omitting her from their list of invitations to General de Vesci's ball; a *fête* which—thanks to their own fashiona-

ble currency, and the metallic currency of the Ex-Governor's rupees—had proved one of the most brilliant of the season. The tribe of Westland had been overpowered by the ranks of the peerage, commanded by Lady Maria; and the results of the splendid evening had procured to Eleanor (aided by her own skilful management) the *reputation* of having refused Sir William Wyndham, and to Claudia the *bona fide* honours of a proposal from the younger son of an Irish Earl; an offer which, after having carefully ascertained that his elder brother was a young man of the rudest habits of plebeian health, Lady Maria had thought proper to reject.

At the very moment, however, that Mrs. Grandison finally renounced her hope of coaxing the Willinghams back into good humour, one of Lady Maria's own choicest specimens of caligraphic humbuggery was placed in her hands; earnestly entreating her to procure an invitation to the breakfast for her youngest daughter, Minnie; who was passing a few days at home, previous to the departure of her family for the Continent. Being fully aware of Mrs. Grandison's influence with Lord Cosmo Somerset, one of the originators of the *fête*, she preferred applying to *her*, rather than provoking the comments of Lady Robert Lorton; who had resolutely declared her intention of absenting herself from the Wimbledon breakfast. Nothing could have been better timed than such an application; and all was immediately settled. Eleanor accepted a seat in the barouche; and little Minnie, sanctioned by Mrs. Grandison's invitation, replaced her sister in the De Vesci's carriage.

It was the first time that the volatile Eleanor had felt really at her ease since she had so harshly terminated the hopes of Frederick Lorimer. Her conduct on that occasion had proved a signal of misfortune to the family; being followed by the announcement of the Duke of Lisborough's engagement to Lady Anastasia; and by her own mortifying misconception respecting the views entertained by Sir William Wyndham;—while her personal disappointments had been aggravated by the sight of Claudia's failing health, in disguise of which they had rashly pursued their accustomed round of dissipation. To cheat the fashionable world of its meed of mockery, they had danced with aching hearts at many a ball; and twined the garland of pleasure around brows throbbing with the consciousness of degradation. Eleanor's disappointment, indeed, had its bright side; she had escaped an eternal union with a man whom she despised; and she always assured herself that Sir William Wyndham's prosiness and his creaking boots, formed a consolatory *per contra* to his rent-roll and family diamonds.—But alas! it was not thus with Claudia!

From the moment that the news of his Grace of Lisbo-

rough's engagement was first circulated by Lady Grayfield's officious zeal, nothing else had been talked of or thought of throughout the various circles of London. Every one had some common-place phrase to repeat on the subject; for it was considered a highly respectable topic of discourse. Many affected "never to have thought the Duke a marrying man," who had never thought twice about him in the course of their lives; and others had "always predicted that his Grace's flirtation with Claudia Willingham would end in nothing"—who, till her name had been circulated upon the same breath of rumour that wafted the news of Lady Anastasia's promotion, had never chanced to hear it pronounced. It was in vain that Eleanor devised plans of amusement in order to distract her sister's attention from this all-engrossing alliance. At Almack's, some partner, inexperienced in the gossip of the day, some "scarlet runner" of a cornet in the Life Guards, or raw dandy from Oxford, was sure to refresh the wound by a detail of the expected splendours of the Duchess of Lisborough; and whenever in the course of her dowager airings with Mrs. De Vesci or old Lady Monteagle, she entered a shop, the first object presented for approbation was sure to claim the sanction of Lady Anastasia Burgoyne's name;—every new bracelet, and new carriage invented in London, was said to have been selected by the Duke of Lisborough for his bride! Poor Claudia was destined to hear but of him and of his tenderness; and as, according to the severe canons of modern fashion, the loving couple themselves were carefully secluded by their friends from public view, the farce was admirably kept up on all sides.

To Claudia, however, that farce was of very tragical endurance; and the more so from the constant effort to command her own feelings, by which she was partly enabled to deceive her mother. She was persuaded that nothing would afford so satisfactory a vent to Lady Maria's irritated feelings, as to have a reasonable excuse for recounting to all her own immediate set the sufferings of her daughter—the martyrdom to which she had been wantonly consigned by the Duke of Lisborough's unwarrantable fickleness! But of this legitimate subject of complaint her Ladyship was defrauded by Claudia's singular fortitude, and Eleanor's presence of mind. Not even those who approached them most familiarly, had the least right to accuse them of having experienced one moment's disappointment. But Eleanor was not only growing weary of her tedious "part of excellent dissembling," but extremely uneasy on account of her sister's sleepless nights and failing appetite. She had little hope of alluring her mother to Spa; where the mineral springs had formerly proved of powerful efficacy in fortifying Claudia's delicate constitution; until General De Vesci's opportune generosity had so unex-

pectedly enabled her to place in the hands of Lady Maria the sum necessary to defray the expenses of the excursion. Instead of wasting the five hundred pound note on superfluous finery, it was appropriated to a continental tour; and Eleanor soon found little difficulty in persuading the whimsical Lady Robert to associate herself with their party for the summer. Minnie was to remain in England under the care of the Heddeston family; and although the plan was somewhat hastily arranged, it was perfect in all its branches, and had restored the whole party to good humour, through the all-powerful excitement of the "pleasures of hope." The Willinghams did not think it necessary to inform Lady Robert that they were flying from the vexatious sight of the Duke of Lisborough's marriage; nor did *she* feel herself compelled to acquaint them that their own object in the journey was to break off her intimate connexion with Mrs. Grandison and her gang. In the mean time all London regarded them as a very happy little knot of friends; rich enough, and idle enough to convey their summer *ennuis* as far as the Prussian frontier of the Netherlands.

But although both the Willinghams and Lady Robert were, or persuaded themselves that they were "aweary of the world"—(that world which is comprised within the three westerly parishes of the British metropolis)—they all secretly and severally, though unconfessedly, regretted that the date of the day fixed for their departure to Dover, would deprive them of the pleasure of assisting at the most brilliant and original fête of the season;—the breakfast to be given at Wimbledon in honour of the rival beauties of London. Lord Cosmo Somerset, Mr. Tichborne, and Sir George Wolryche, had persuaded Lord Stapylford to hire the beautiful villa of Ebury Hill, within six weeks of his father's decease, in order to afford them a locale for this chivalrous undertaking; and it was shrewdly suspected that with Prestwell's assistance, he had contributed at least his own and Tichborne's share of the funds which they all four affected to subscribe in defrayment of the expenses. Nothing indeed could exceed the clamour of expectation excited by the lavish preparations for the fête; and the four ladies who were suspected as the veiled goddesses of its worship, were pointed out by many an envious tongue in the persons of Ladies Robert Lorton, Barringhurst, and Desmond, and Mrs. Grandison. Sir George Wolryche, indeed, was known to adorn nothing but himself, and was generally accused of insinuating himself into this gallant project for the pleasure of concocting the bill of fare, and assuming a temporary importance wich insured him listeners and laughers for his threadbare jests during the remainder of the season.

Lady Robert, who was fully conscious that the idle and

inconsistent Lord Stapylford had been deluded by his intriguing companions into the affectation of a sentimental passion for herself, had at first been seized with a severe fit of prudish virtue, determining her to absent herself from Ebury;—but she was by no means sorry that Lady Barringhurst's position afforded her an excuse for departing from her resolution; while Lady Maria, who, by way of courting her Ladyship, had expressed the most vehement readiness to leave town on the very day of the breakfast, found a highly diverting apology for her own infirmity of purpose, in a sudden accession of maternal sensibility towards Minnie. "She should not see her poor dear girl again for many months; and she was eager to show her a glimpse of the world, and afford her a little amusement previous to her departure. Lady Willingham thought a girl of fourteen too young to be introduced to such a scene, but then Lady Willingham was notoriously rigid on such points; and even chose to absent herself and her daughter from the breakfast in compliment to old Lady Monteagle. Now Lady Maria could not see what right her old friend and neighbour had to interfere with Lord Stapylford's amusements; if the young lord thought proper to entertain himself and the world too early in his mourning, his grandmother and her country neighbours had better close their eyes upon so boyish an offence. In short, *for Minnie's sake*—both she and her daughters had resolved to defer their journey for another day, and appear at the Ebury fête!"—People often think their logic irrefragable, because nobody cares to confute it. They terminate some uninteresting egotistical harangue with convincing self-applause, without perceiving that the bowing audience have bestowed nothing beyond the "*porches* of their ears" upon its subtleties. It is, in fact, an impertinence to intrude the arguments which influence our private affairs upon the patience of indifferent persons; for the world is but slightly altered since the days of the Vicar of Wakefield; it troubles itself to say and think very little of our paradoxes.—But to return to Ebury!—

Much has been said by tourists and sung by poets, of the beauties of Tempe;—much of Vallombrosa—of Vaucluse—of the Rheingau. The skies of Italy, the seas of Greece, the summer sweetness of many a tropical climate, have been hymned by the sentimental of our land; and if the writers and talkers of England are to be credited, our *own* earth and our *own* air are alone incapable of charming the senses, and forming a landscape worthy the celebration of the painter and the poet. To such unworthy slanderers I venture to throw down a gauntlet of provocation; challenging them to show one earthly spot more beautiful than an English park, in all its vernal pride of woods and waters and verdure; a retreat more exquisite than a first-rate flower-garden; or a crisis of

atmospheric enjoyment more faultless than the "gray day" of an English summer.

The level lawns of Ebury, varied by the tufted thickets of surrounding slopes, and shelving towards a glassy lake, were glowing with an infinite variety of honied blossoms, and perfumed by the fragrance of unnumbered roses; when the wind-instruments, whose musicians were concealed by the sweeping branches of the feathered lime-trees, breathed forth their first voluptuous symphony in honour of the arrival of Lady Barringhurst and Lady Robert Lorton. The fair guests were required to pass through the flowery labyrinth of an immense conservatory at the further door of which their gallant hosts were stationed to pay the usual compliments of welcome; and beyond, a group of village girls in the costumes of the different cantons of Switzerland, threw bouquets of flowers at the feet of the more favoured beauties as they passed. The first sound which greeted the ears of Lady Robert Lorton as she entered the trelliced conservatory, whose pendant blossoms were trained into a sort of flowery dome above, was the giggle of the Lorimer girls; who were attended, as usual, by a simultaneous troop of the most gregarious detachment of the Household brigade; and who were venting their delight and amazement in fugues and canons of unmeaning vocatives. "Charming!—delightful!—enchanting!—delicious!—superb!—exquisite!" The next was a murmuring whisper of reproach, breathed in the ears of her lovely companion by Mr. Tichborne, "You promised us to be here early, Lucy—You promised me that I should accompany you:—is this keeping your word?"—And although she very honourably turned away her head, at the risk of demolishing one of Herbant's most imaginative hats among the branches of a Dhatura sheeted with silver blossoms, she could not but overhear that Lady Barringhurst's vindication of herself rested upon an accusation beginning with the name of "Lady Robert Lorton." After this she was not surprised at the lowering brow which Mr. Tichborne presumed to turn upon herself!

From the remonstrances of her own admirer, meanwhile, she knew herself to be secure. Lord Stapylford not only had "never told his love," but was far from having outlived the age of blushing at its presumption. He received her at the external door of the conservatory with a stammer of confused apologies for the earnestness with which he had ventured to press his invitation on her acceptance; and when she turned away to speak to Eleanor Willingham, whose arrival on Mrs. Grandison's arm had immediately preceded her own, the boy-lover remained planted at his original post, with a look of the most respectful despair. He presumed

not to force his attentions where they appeared so ill-appreciated.

It is scarcely possible to conceive how any person really acquainted with the frame of London society, can be guilty of the magnanimous self-sacrifice of attempting to contribute towards its entertainment. To purchase admission for a tribe of daughters to the future festivities of the season, or to bribe the great world to admit within its sanctuary some splendid nonentity from Oriental India, or Oriental London, may offer an excuse for the amiable weakness of a determined giver of balls. But to attempt the acquirement of a reputation of this description—to toil for the fame of adding originality to hospitality—to seek the ruinous honours of having given "the best thing of the season"—is indeed labour lost, and money squandered! Although, for a previous fortnight, nothing perhaps has been talked of but the invitations bestowed, and asked for, and declined—although some vacant seat in Parliament has been less eagerly an object of ambition than a ticket for the coming ball or breakfast—although the most elaborate preparations have insured a graceful perfection of toilet on the part of the guests, and a promising prospectus of the pleasures of the day—or night—yet when the appointed moment really arrives, a general affectation of listlessness pervades the scene, and ingratitude is á-tiptoe to anticipate a general failure.

"I should not have come," drawled Captain Macneill to Gertrude Lorimer, trusting to Providence that she was ignorant of all the manœuvres, and visits paid, and notes written, and lies invented, by which he had tardily secured an invitation, "only Stapylford bored me so on the subject. He is a very good little fellow, and one does not like to disappoint him; but at the close of the season, one is positively worn out by these dancing breakfasts."

"Oh! as to that," observed Sir George Meredyth, one of his brother officers, "I should have liked the thing well enough—as I told Wolryche last night at the Opera—only the distance is such a cursed venture to encounter, for the possible chance of a tolerable breakfast. As I rode through Piccadilly I bespoke a hackney-coach, in case of rain, to come down and fetch away my pony; and I shall make Stapylford let me have half his poodle's camp-bed for myself. Do you know, Miss Lorimer, that Gillow has fitted up Stapylford's kennel with mahogany stalls and hair mattresses?"

"How very absurd you are!—I always quote *you*, Sir George, as the inventor of every improbable report current in London," replied Gertrude, enchanted by his fastidiousness; "I could wish, however, that among Gillow's contributions to the luxuries of Ebury, he had thought of providing a few benches or camp-stools; for in five minutes more I shall expire.

of fatigue. We have positively been wandering about among the American shrubberies this quarter of an hour."

"Oh! do not dream of so plebeian a luxury as repose, o such an occasion as this," observed Lord Atherley, another of the little military group. "We are to be torn to pieces between the attractions of a Tyrolian fair—a sham fight on the lake—a ballet—a tragedy displayed in fireworks—and a high-life comedy represented by cascades and *jets d'eau!*"

"A sham fight on the lake!" murmured Emily Lorimer, putting up her glass to gaze upon a beautiful sheet of water, whose glassy surface offered a delicious reflection of the surrounding groves; "do they call that pond a lake?—Forbid it Leman and Como and Ullswater!"

"A lake—*à la mode de* George Robins. It is said that Stapylford *did* enter into a contract with Delcroix to fill it with lavender water; but Lord Cosmo and he could not agree whether it was to be '*aux milleflcurs*' or '*ambrée*," and so the project fell to the ground; and they were obliged to content themselves with clearing it of all the common-place carp and tench, and filling it, instead, with gold and silver fish, hired of Phillips for the day."

"You are quite scandalous!" persisted Miss Lorimer with a laugh of applause, and again putting up her glass. "But after all, I see nothing of this wonderful fleet."

"The Spanish fleet you cannot see, for it is not in sight!" replied Sir George with a sneer, "except unto such as are blest with microscopic eyes. Stapylford hired sixteen Dorking wagons to convey the materials for his Naumachia to Ebury; for *my* part, I should have been happy to undertake its transportation with three wheelbarrows and a baker's truck. Robinson Crusoe's long boat would have proved a craft tremendous as that of Blackbeard the pirate, to such a fleet!"

"And the Tyrolian fair?"

"Oh! that little elegant device of gallantry is stationed at the further end of the park, among the ant-hills and mole-hills; which Wolryche thought assumed an air of the picturesque savouring of the landscapes of the Tyrol. There is one *very* large one, the residence of the consular-mole of the little republic, which he declares is a facsimile of the outline of the Brenner mountain."

"And the ballet? is it to be one of the insipid nothings to which we have been familiarized this season at the King's Theatre?"

"Oh! fie—can you imagine that we are to be presented with anything less than original at Ebury?—I understand it is one of the tales from Lalla Rookh, dramatized and pirouettized by Coulon."

"Certainly!" added Captain Macneill. "The ballet is called 'Paradise and the Peri.' Little Pauline is to enact the

wandering angel, and flies about tear-gathering, with one of Howell and James's chrysophrase *flacons* in her hand."

"Delightful!—enchanting!" exclaimed both the Lorimer girls; while the heroes of the cuirass, equally satisfied to have contributed to their mystification, regarded each other with a complacent smile, anticipative of the anti-Lorimer review of the case which was destined to enliven the morrow's mess-dinner."

Eleanor Willingham, meanwhile, had by no means bargained for the position in which she found herself, as *double* to Mrs. Grandison. She had fully expected to join Lady Maria and her sisters immediately upon her arrival at Ebury; and although she had no definitive conquest in view—no eldest son or gouty Baronet to attract or retain in her chains, yet since the departure of Frederick Lorimer, and the defection of Sir William, she had degenerated into something of a general flirt;—repeated failures had rendered her desperate, and she was almost as well inclined to waltz with Captain Macneill, or Sir Comyne Wallace, or decide upon the arguries of "Love-destiny" with the blossom of an aster and Lord Atherley's assistance, as either Gertrude or Emily, or any other thoughtless girl in London. Instead of these diversions, however, or diversions such as these, she found herself reluctantly compelled to accept Lord Cosmo Somerset's vacant arm; which by many an unconscious and sympathetic pressure betrayed to her in what manner its fellow contributed to the support of Mrs. Grandison, who occupied the left flank. Her ready tact convinced her that her presence was only sought and endured as a *blind* by the rest of the party; and as the trio wandered together among the embowered walks of the blossomy shrubbery, or stood romanticizing on the borders of the lake, she had some difficulty to avoid overhearing the whispers of her companions—which were of far too pointed a character to be calculated for the amusement or forbearance of a third person.

Grievously mortified—bored to extinction—and not a little irritated to find herself occupying so equivocal a situation, Eleanor Willingham had too vast a share of the crafty self-possession animating fashionable young ladies of the present day, to allow any expression of the real state of her feelings to expand upon her countenance. She was well aware that of all moods ill-humour is the least becoming to the features, and the least capable of exciting sympathy; and she was careful not to assume the fretful air of a conscious dupe. Nay! so practised was the fair Eleanor in the art of beguiling the time by looking *like* the time, that on the present occasion the smiles which accompanied her brow to every greeting friend, appeared as spontaneous as can well be imagined.

She seemed to be both voluntarily and contentedly a party concerned, in the generally-recognized flirtation between the giddy Mrs. Grandison and Lord Cosmo Somerset!

"What a grievous thing to see a pretty and talented young creature like that, so thoroughly familiarized to the corruptions of society!" observed Lord Grandville to Lady Rachel Verney, after an encounter with the mysterious trio among the shadowy glades of a "cedarn covert." "You and I, my dear Lady Rachel, who have some fifteen years' experience of the wicked ways of this wicked world, could not assume a look of more artless unconsciousness, than that with which Eleanor Willingham lends the sanction of her innocent presence to *la* Grandison's evil-doings. I confess I have no predilection myself for young ladies in the *mouton qui rêve* style; but then I boldly profess myself of the *roué* school, and am not a marrying man. Now Lady Maria, who is professedly on the matrimonial tack for her daughters, ought to see and know that she is irremediably blighting their prospects, by allowing them to see and be seen, among the connections of the vicious and—"

"Hush! hush!"—exclaimed Lady Rachel Verney. "Alcibiades turned Timon?—this will never do!—You, my dear Lord Grandville, who have not the smallest pretension to play Sir Oracle on points of morality, may fairly allow my friend Lady Maria to regulate her own and her daughters' consciences according to her own good liking. Universal toleration is one of our national boasts."

"And pretty widely has it been extended, and pretty loudly vaunted by the latitudinarians of society!—Well! Heaven mend us!—When I observe libertinism, like some obscene reptile crawling over the leaves of our roses and lilies—when I see women—young and nominally innocent women—polluted by the filthy slime of its track—I grow ashamed of my calling, and could sometimes wish I had never 'heard the chimes at midnight.'"

"How long have you affected this maudlin sensibility?"

"Ever since I have observed the fairer and softer sex assuming the brazen front of impudence. I can laugh at sin in Tichborne; and overlook it in the piquant little Grandison; but a lovely girl in parading the cloven foot, tempts me to visit the exhibition with all the castigation prescribed by Othello;—not upon herself, but upon her parents. There will come a time—either through death or sorrow, when Lady Maria will mourn in sackcloth and ashes over the lessons of worldly wisdom she has bestowed upon her daughters."

This colloquy, as well as the speaking sneer of many an observant eye, was of course inaudible to its unsuspecting

object. Eleanor Willingham pursued her discontented way amid the varied pleasures of the fête, with a brow radiant with smiles; and many among her host of admirers, who would have been delighted to insure her as their companion, forebore to intrude upon a party apparently so well arranged, and so well pleased with each other.

Meanwhile there was one of the condemnatory host whose air of mistrustful displeasure was visible even to herself. It was a young man of striking if not elegant appearance, who was an utter stranger to her; although his distinguished air, as well as his evident intimacy with Lord Stapylford and many of the most refined loungers of Ebury, plainly declared him to be a member, however obscure, of the world of fashion. Without being at all handsome, this man of mystery was gifted with a glance of intellectual intelligence distinguishing him from the common herd of *ennuyés* and fine gentlemen by which he was surrounded; and although Eleanor could think of no better definition whereby to paint him in her inquiries, than "a tall and very fair young man, extremely taciturn and solitary," she longed to describe him as "a very interesting looking personage who, for some reason which I cannot imagine, continually fixes an indignant and contemptuous observation upon all my movements."

Her curiosity, however, remained ungratified;

Name and station none could tell!

and she was beginning to despair of acquainting herself with the real character of her provoking and unknown satirist, when she suddenly caught a glimpse of his figure in the distance, leading her sister Minnie towards the dancers. She was now more startled and perplexed than ever. Minnie, who was one of the prettiest little fairies in the world, and bright with an early flush of youth such as seldom survives the vigils and heartburnings of even a single season, had from her first entrance at Ebury excited far more sensation in the fashionable crowd than had been anticipated by her mother and sisters—and seemed destined to revive the fairy triumphs of the Cenerentola. Lord Stapylford, too, who had been the playmate and friend of her childhood, welcomed her unexpected appearance among his guests with the warmest delight, seeming to forget his feigned or fancied attachment to Lady Robert Lorton in the girlish and unstudied graces of her juvenile rival;—and Eleanor having observed her mysterious censor to be the intimate friend of the young Lord of Ebury, naturally concluded that he was indebted for his acquaintance with Minnie to Stapylford's presentation. But when she saw her little trembling timid sister hang contentedly upon the stranger's

arm, and smile up in his face with a glance of good understanding and affectionate regard, she avowed herself to be considerably puzzled! It was in vain, however, to question Lord Cosmo Somerset; his understanding was engrossed "full fathom five," by love and metaphysical casuistry with Mrs. Grandison. Having once pronounced that the great unknown was "some unmuzzled bear—some college-friend of Stapylford's"—he thought it extremely impertinent on Miss Willingham's part to intrude her curiosity on his further patience. "*Who* would bore himself with answering idle questions in the dog-days?"

Unfortunately the Platonic argumentations in which her two companions were engaged, rendered them not only captious under the investigations of her feminine curiosity, but extremely insensible to that common-place prompting of our physical nature vulgarly denominated hunger. They wandered on among the most unfrequented groves and sylvan thickets of the park; until they lost sight of the fête, and sound of the dinner or breakfast gong; so that when the company were finally seated at the different tables, whether in hall—saloon—tent—or marquee—that at which Lord Cosmo had been appointed to preside was found to be unhonoured by its hospitable host; thereby exciting a thousand surmises and innuendos as to the probable cause of his absence. A substitute, meantime, was loudly and universally called for; when some wicked wit, or particularly good-natured friend, opportunely suggested that Mr. Grandison should occupy the vacant chair of presideney. Poor little, stupid, pompous Mr. Grandison, indeed, desired no better than to become of temporary importance; and judiciously prefaced every proposal for a glass of Champagne, or a juxta-position of *poulets* and *patés*, "In the absence of *my friend* Lord Cosmo, allow me to suggest!"

Weary, and hungry, and heartsick, and peevish—Eleanor at length persuaded her companions to draw towards the villa; where, on arriving, they had of course the pleasure to hear and see, "The tables full!" Of course, too, it required but a trifling exertion of authority on Lord Cosmo's part, to have a fresh one immediately spread for themselves, in an adjoining tent; which became quickly thronged by those importunate idlers, who had been either too late or too disagreeable to secure a ready admittance among the earlier detachments. Eleanor had therefore the supreme satisfaction of eating her "*croquettes de lapereau*," *and* "*tourte praline'e*," among the *élite* of the bores. Their forlorn hope of a repast became literally a refuge for the destitute!

Nor was this the sole inconvenience resulting to her from Lord Cosmo Somerset's erratic courses, and Mrs. Grandison's

truant disposition. It was not to be supposed that their tardy progress would influence that of the programme of the fête; and the remainder of the guests having dined previous to their dilatory homeward march, naturally looked for some immediate entertainment to follow their own gastronomic feats. While Eleanor, therefore, was busy with her *glace panachée* and *pains de patience*, she had the satisfaction of seeing the whole party parade gaily before the entrance of the tent; some towards the lake—some towards the Tyrolian fair;—but all bent upon pleasurable indulgence and joyous festivity. Yet in spite of these continued sounds of mirth and diversion, Lord Cosmo and his fair friend continued to whisper over their maraschino, and break mottoed bonbons for each other's gratification, with as much exclusive self-engrossment as if they only had inhabited the marquee—or the universe; nothing caring for the weariness of their involuntary companion, or for the malicious interpretation of the wise men and "fools who came to scoff," still lingering around their table.

Just as her patience was becoming exhausted, and she was meditating some biting sally of reproof, or bold sally from imprisonment, a voice whispered in her ear, "Miss Willingham—will you give me leave to conduct you to your sister, who has met with a trifling accident?" and on turning hastily round, she found herself to have been actually addressed by "the man of mystery." Now to Eleanor's heart the name of *sister* presented only the image of Claudia; who had grown up with her to womanhood, and was of course more immediately connected with her impulses of feeling than a girl of Minnie's age. Starting therefore from her seat, she accepted the stranger's proffered arm without further question or delay; and it was not until she had rushed several paces from the tent that she found breath to exclaim—"Surely nothing serious has occurred?—I left Claudia with my mother—surely——"

"I was wrong, perhaps, to startle you by the word *accident*," replied her companion in a pacifying tone. "Minnie is not hurt, nor even much alarmed; but as I could not find Lady Maria, and as *your* retreat was immediately pointed out to me, I thought it more proper—more becoming—that *you* should lend her your assistance than——"

"Thank God! thank God!"—interrupted Eleanor, with the deep inspiration of a person relieved from painful alarm. "I was apprehensive that my eldest sister had been seized with a sudden illness;—her health is extremely delicate—extremely precarious;" and as this voluntary avowal passed her lips, the tears burst from her oppressed heart.

Her mysterious companion seemed surprised and touched by her emotion, for he resumed his explanation with a soften-

ed voice and manner. "Again I ought to apologize for having unnecessarily alarmed you. I used the word 'sister,' as the most instant mode of exciting your attention, and withdrawing you from your companions."

"And my sister Minnie?" faltered Eleanor, painfully aware of a certain emphasis laid on the latter word.

"I could not succeed in dissuading her from accompanying Stapylford in one of those absurd nautilus pleasure-boats—which appear to have been prepared for no other purpose than the possible chance of drowning some of his guests; when fortunately, just as Minnie was seated, and before they had left the shelving of the shore, Stapylford's Newfoundland dog, who is accustomed to accompany his master in his yacht, leapt into the boat, and it was upset in a moment."

Eleanor uttered a cry of consternation.

"Pray do not be alarmed, the accident had not one heroic symptom!—They were not out of their depth—not three feet from the shore; and although I was standing by, I had not a moment's opportunity to jump in, for the gratification of being termed 'Minnie's gallant preserver' during the remainder of my days;—with an extended arm I was enabled to seize her dress, and draw her to the turf."

"She must have been dreadfully frightened."

"By no means!—After laughing heartily at the adventure, she was alarmed at nothing but the prospect of Lady Maria's displeasure. Minnie is not old enough for the sentimental terrors of a heroine."

Eleanor, now re-assured on all sides, began to think the tall fair taciturn young gentleman extremely familiar and impertinent; and to doubt whether she had not been made the subject of a hoax.

"Your sister was too much encumbered by her wet clothes to walk, and I therefore carried her in my arms to the lodge—where she was assisted by the assiduities of Stapylford and the porter's wife;—we shall be there in five minutes."

"You are right in supposing that Mamma will be greatly displeased by her giddiness—by all this exposure among strangers," said Eleanor haughtily, in the hope of checking her companion's familiarity.

"Among strangers?—pardon me!—but considering the extent of the throng assembled to-day at Ebury, I consider dear Minnie fortunate that her adventure occurred under no harsher inspection than that of her old play-fellow—her plighted love!"

"I was not aware that Lord Stapylford had already claimed that distinction," said Eleanor in an angry voice, and quickening her steps towards the lodge.

"Minnie must have grown very reserved lately, if she has

learned to designate him by any other name," said the provoking stranger, laughing at her air of indignation.

"And *you*, Sir!"—said Eleanor, irritated beyond her patience. "Have you an equal claim upon my sister's confidence?"

"Is it possible that you do not know me?" said the stranger, apparently amazed in his turn. "Is it possible that you do not remember your cousin, Charles Willingham?"

END OF VOL. I.